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## THE HEIR OF VALLIS.

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### CHAPTER I.

IN the gloomy interval between Napier's last departure from Vallis House and the present time, who would not wish that a glimmering of light, obtained from the small hope which yet remained, should comfort the hearts of the afflicted inmates of this household? But for the belief that there was something good in store for them, their spirits would have sunk into a dejection difficult to overcome. Still they had almost hourly new difficulties to encounter,—fresh sources of uneasiness developing themselves to them. Yet there was the

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the troubled breast gave forth that secret, and resigned its charge.

“To hold his faith side by side with the dread which haunts me, would pollute his honour.”

She could say no more ; even these few words were whispered rather than spoken ; and, as Lady Napier’s sympathizing eye was bent upon her, she saw that the expression of Ellen’s dear countenance had lost a something she had never missed before. After this sad interview, Ellen Neville’s visits to Vallis House ceased. In the solitude of Mowbray, nearly two months passed in so sad a suspense, that, but for her parent’s constant claim on her attention, life would have been well nigh insupportable.

The spring of the year had returned again. The fresh breeze whistled through the vale. Nature was rife with high design ;—the early plants were putting forth their leaves ;—the primrose and the violet had exchanged glad congratulation. It was a bright afternoon ; the glass door of the withdrawing-room at Vallis was open to the balcony. Within the parlour sat those who were now united by feelings of the warmest affection and sympathy. By



same trust and gentleness, the same generosity and charity animating them. To those dependent upon the Napiers' consideration, there was the same ardour of benevolence extended as heretofore; and the interests of those who were even beyond a claim upon their care, when known, met at Mr Wilmott's hands a prompt and generous sympathy.

It will be concluded that the Lady Inez had returned to her relatives. There was no alternative. The necessity of the step seemed mutually recognised, and no explanation was rendered to Inez. With Lady Napier, however, the case was different. A mind like Ellen Neville's, so pure, so sensitive, and so true, could not be at rest without explaining the reason of her conduct to one who had ever been so steadfast a friend.

Ellen's interview with Lady Napier was painful and agitating. She had touched upon her dark fears, and had received the mournful silence of her listener as an omen of her bitter belief in the reality of so stern a consummation of events. Still Ellen struggled. There was one deep internal feeling to explain,—a secret to disclose,—one garnered hope to resign. On mention of Charles Napier's name,

the troubled breast gave forth that secret, and resigned its charge.

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the side of the fragile and drooping Inez, Mary Napier performed her labour of love and care. Whilst she was present, Inez could not remain in painful rumination long; and her comfort to that bruised heart may be easily surmised. As they had done for many days, nay weeks, those individuals who comprised the Vallis circle sat together, and exchanged opinions relative to events which made so acute a demand upon their sympathies. Lady Napier withheld no secrets from her children. Inez she called her own dear daughter; and though dark fears sadly tortured her at times, she spared no pains to give courage to those about her: and the vigour which this pure, unselfish labour afforded to her own reason sustained her fortitude under those accidental circumstances of distress which had beset her. Inez appeared calm,—resigned. The expression of that sweet face had become more wistful. The cheek was paler; still she did not display her emotion. From a glance into her true heart, perhaps, it would have been seen that she still felt too keenly that her soul was too expectant, and thus a still inward fever prayed on her physical powers. *They* were daily lessening; and though

she knew this, it was wonderful to witness the fortitude with which she sustained her sad position, when in the presence of those whose small sum of happiness she now *felt* to depend on her tranquillity. At this hour, Inez was reclining on a sofa; her dark tresses thrown back, and her earnest eyes fixed on Mary Napier's face, who was sitting by her, and had just then finished a letter she had read to her.

"They have grounds for fresh uneasiness at Mowbray," Mary said. "Mr Neville has left Paris, mamma," she added, turning to her mother. "You see Fanny is anxious to return to us."

"Naturally," answered Lady Napier to her daughter's words; "we will send the carriage for her to-morrow," and then Lady Napier observed, without raising her eyes from the desk at which she was writing: "This intelligence of Mr Wilmott's relative to the strange female is very singular; and his account of Colonel Neville's conduct still more extraordinary. Can Mr Wilmott's discovery have any concern with Colonel Neville's strange proceedings? though we all believed, even Dr Powell, that he would be confined at Mowbray a hopeless invalid. I hear he wanders forth at night in the

most inclement weather, repelling attendance, staying away for hours, and returning in a state of mind bordering on frenzy. But it cannot be. What connexion could exist between him and the Armstrongs' secret and imperious lodger?"

Mary Napier's face seemed rife with intelligence: she was about to reply to her mother, when Dr Powell was announced.

After the worthy Doctor had paid his necessary attentions to his patient—for poor Inez, alas! required more than ever his watchful care—he conversed, in his own earnest and simple manner, on general topics for a short time.

Hardly a day elapsed that Mary Napier's warm heart was not tortured by unjust aspersions cast upon her brother and some member of their household; and another rumour had agitated her not a little. She had been confidently given to understand that Langton and Mr Pearson were no more or less than two swindlers; the former having attached himself to Charles Napier with the intent to ruin him; and the latter had behaved so outrageously to Mr Wilton, because this individual had detected him in his lawless proceedings. Moreover, Mary had


been assured that Langton's account of himself was utterly false. That some gentleman at S—— had met the owner of the ship in which it was said her cousin had embarked, and that he had ascertained there was no such name as Langton amongst the passengers. Captain Curran, it was true, had taken his passage in the ill-starred ship; but who the individual was who represented himself as the sole survivor, the informant had not the remotest idea.

To the first part of this tattle, Mary Napier could vouchsafe a smile. She knew Pearson to be sincere; still this latter intelligence caused her much uneasiness. To Dr Powell, for he stood in the light of a true friend to the members of Vallis and Mowbray, she had intrusted this report. He at once traced it to Whittaker, Wilton's crafty agent, and therefore small regard was attached to it. Still Mary could not entirely dispel the impression which had been made. Though her faith in Langton's honour was not shaken, still the mystery which hung about him—his early singularity of conduct—the part, without explaining his reason, which he had taken in the difficulties with

which her family had been surrounded—perplexed her ; and she had trusted this fascinating stranger. In spite of her well-formed resolutions, she could not cease to think of him with feelings very closely approximating to affection. And he, with his acute powers of observation, had he not perceived a gradually increasing sensitiveness of emotion in his presence ? With his rare powers of discernment, had he not discovered that she loved him ? Indeed, when they were last together, did not a word reveal the fact, that they were mutually conscious of feelings which had been mutually suppressed. Still there had been no explanation. He had not even written a line to her, but contented himself with mentioning her in general terms, and including her in his remembrance of other friends in his repeated communications with the Lady Inez.

All these little facts caused Mary Napier to speculate, in the silence of her own thoughts, a great deal more than she would have willingly confessed.

The Lady Inez was the first to speak :—" It is strange we do not hear from Charles. Have you, Dr Powell, lately heard from your friend—from Mr Langton ?"



"I have not," was the reply; but uttered in a constrained manner.

"Oh! this suspense is terrible," remarked Inez,—"it despoils one of hope—of expectation—of the vigour of the mind!"

Lady Napier gazed tenderly upon the speaker: it had been a long time since Inez had spoken thus. Were the old sorrows, the old fears, again to be revived? If so, she would sink under them. For some period, she had preserved an even temperament. She had struggled successfully—so friends thought—against ideas so dangerous to her peace. Was that morbid wretchedness, which once tortured her so bitterly, to return? And at the fear, Lady Napier drew the weak fragile form to her as she sat by her side, and said,—“You are happy, dear love, happy in the affection of such true friends, and resigned to the will of an All-wise Providence!”

From a natural delicacy, Dr Powell drew slightly aside, and leant over a book which he saw at hand; still he could not help overhearing the thrilling reply which Inez made to the kind words thus spoken to her.

“Happy!” she answered with a voice of inde-



scribable cadence.—“ Happy, dear mother !—Yes !—when I have fortitude sufficient to say ‘ Thy will be done !’—And I then turn to you, and to Mary’s ever-watchful eye of love. It is a moment when existence—mere existence—is an inexpressible bliss. My soul is with friends, then, whose hearts expand in the fulness of their sympathy; and I could kneel and worship them. I see love in the words they speak to me. I see light in the flowers they bring. Yea, they, too, smile with affection upon me !—I revert to the joys that were—blotting out the time that followed—and I walk again in those paths which I frequented when sorrows and fears were strangers to my heart.”—Her hand rose wearily to her brow, as she continued, after a slight pause :—“ Then the turbulent thought comes across my brain !—Memory gives forth its secret—my heart faints—my slight courage is taken at a disadvantage—I might endure it, did I know the worst, but the intermittent fever which follows on suspense is wearing my soul away.”

Mary Napier had drawn near ; and she said,—“ We shall hear soon from Charles—from Mr Langton, Inez, your true friend. No doubt, they have

reasons for their silence. You know they argue so well when you do hear from them, that we should have all confidence in their proceedings. Think of the many proofs of their watchful interest in our feelings, and let these facts inspire you with courage a little longer."

"Pardon me, dear one," whispered Inez, with a tear glittering in her eye, "the human heart, when despoiled of its anchor, is irritable, and the tongue is querulous."

Mary suddenly asked, to draw Inez's thoughts away from that subject,—“But poor Ellen, Dr Powell, does her health suffer?—We are very anxious about her. Assure her so. Since our sad estrangement, she is more endeared to us than ever!”

“She endures her hard lot with a fortitude that quite passes my comprehension,” answered Dr Powell; “and such is her great control over her feelings, that one would hardly think that she is sad. But I, who know her well—I who, from her childhood, have marked the many noble traits of character with which Nature has endowed her—understand the secret of her sensitive, highly toned mind. Firm, constant, noble being! How resolutely she faces

troubles which would prostrate one of our sex to the dust!"

"And her father, our poor friend, has she still the same influence over him?"

"I cannot say she has," was the reply, in a constrained manner. "One hour he is apathetic; covering his face with his hands, he sits as if physical and mental powers were exhausted. Another, and he goes forth alone, sometimes in the chilly night, wandering hither and thither, it seems without object, muttering strange things, or standing in the pelting rain, agitated by some dark, strange feelings, to which, as yet, we have obtained no positive clue. Suspicions I have, but too undefined to be explained." He paused for a time, then further said, "Miss Napier, these are facts which refer to the unfortunate position in which your family is placed, in regard to our friends at Mowbray, mutually understood, but not discussed. It is well, it would be wrong to enter on topics of so distressing a nature whilst matters are so obscure. I have, however, perceived that you are watchful and observant, and in not perplexing me with questions, have evinced a courage of a very unusual quality. Cherish the

idea that those who are struggling hard beyond your home to bring peace back to it, will accomplish more than you conceive. At present, however, do not let Lady Inez be alone, even in your pleasure grounds."

"Why these restrictions, Dr Powell? Pray relieve my anxiety."

"I will, feeling confident I can place full reliance on your judgment. May I ask if you have **not** a strange eccentric character in your neighbourhood?"

"You mean the female **who** sometimes lodges at the Armstrongs'? Oh yes, **we** have heard a great deal about her; and one day I encountered her at my own seeking. She betrayed evidences of insanity,—saying strange, wild things connected with what you have said concerning Colonel Neville. I own now I am greatly bewildered."

"May I venture to ask you to explain?" asked Dr Powell with uneasiness.

"It was thus I encountered her," answered Mary: "I had wandered through the vale to the grotto, where for a time I was held in conversation with Hannah Williams. She spoke of the person

to whom you allude, and said, that she often came and sat by the waters beneath, where she would remain for hours, sometimes singing, sometimes speaking in a language Hannah could not comprehend. I thought the circumstance very singular, and pondered over it. Whilst resting for a short time in the room over the grotto, suddenly Hannah appeared before me, with a face of much concern, saying, the stranger had that moment passed by, and was sitting in her old resting-place. And she had scarcely finished her remarks, when, as I stepped forward to lean over the balcony, I caught the liquid notes of a voice of great power and expression. The air was low at first, then grew distinct and fearfully expressive. The words were in Italian, bitter, stern, remorseless,—the wailing of a fierce untamed spirit over the sacrifice of honour. Invective deep and fiery,—terrible to listen to,—still the lofty expression of the voice had an electrifying influence. The burden of the concluding line was,—‘ Though guilty, I am fearless, and triumph in his fall,’ or something to this effect. Suddenly she changed the words, and the air,—the burden of misery and anger seemed washed away, and secret, mournful

notes followed. She was wandering under her own bright sky, linked hand in hand with one she passionately loved. A light skiff lay moored some few paces from the shore, to which the lover pointed, whilst speaking to her of the peerless delights which he would strew around her path, and painting happy scenes apart from the distractions of society to which his warm love panted to bear her; something of this sort was the sentiment," pursued Mary with an ingenuous blush, "and it was followed by the girl's pathetic adieu to kindred ties; to home-familiar faces; to the much-loved luxuriant sky; to wave and dell the farewell came in beautiful, almost devotional pathos; and then, as she gave her hand to her lover, prior to embarkation in his skiff, these last words were uttered:—

"Stranger, to thee I trust my soul."

"I could not resist descending to the grotto. I found the person I sought sitting by the spring, gazing abstractedly into the water. Singularly enough, I was not in the least degree nervous. I can only account for it from the influence of her wonderful voice over me, and I stooped down from an impulse of kindness, took her hand, and asked her if she was unhappy."

My intentions seemed bitterly misconstrued. She rose to her feet, and heaped many harsh words upon me, foretelling much misery that would overtake me and mine; then followed a fiery malediction, and these strange words:—

“ Tell George Neville the forsaken one hath cursed thee.”

I was greatly alarmed now, and hastily retreated; meeting Mary Armstrong, I questioned her of the propriety of sheltering so strange an individual, when she answered:—

“ That she followed Mr Pearson’s instructions.” Mary’s voice faltered somewhat when she mentioned the name of Pearson, which Dr Powell evidently noticed, and he was half inclined to say,— ‘ And *you* attach some importance to *his* judgment.’

Mary must have expected such a remark from her companion, for after having played considerable havoc with a flower in her hand, she observed, without raising her eyes:—

“ *He* has been some time absent from this neighbourhood?”

“ Yes! on duty like a faithful sentinel over the hopes of Vallis. You know he is ever near when good service is needed.”

There was another pause, which was broken by Mary saying :—

“ You know a great deal that interests us, and yet keep it secret from us. It is unkind, Dr Powell, to keep us in ignorance of facts which so nearly concern our happiness, and with which we must eventually be acquainted.”

“ I would conceal more from you if I could,” was the answer. “ Do you not think I am aware of your feelings being greatly excited, and that you, from whom we hope so much, are becoming pale and fragile as yon lily? I never deceive you; once your accents were clear and round, now they are tremulous and low. Still you have spirit left. Summon its virtues, and control your sensibilities, or I shall have to prescribe in a different way. I assure you, Miss Napier, I feel more deeply than I can express for your strange position. I see how acutely your good mother suffers, and yet how nobly she restrains her feelings.”

“ She does! she does!” answered Mary, the quick impulse of love beautifully tinging her sad face. “ Truth has nobly tutored her unselfish soul. Oh! Dr Powell, you cannot conceive the might and strength of her protecting love.”



The old bachelor, as he gazed upon Mary's now radiant face, so exquisitely sensitive and feeling in expression, could not help thinking she quite deserved her mother's warm and earnest devotion to her happiness. After a kind farewell, the Doctor took his departure.

"'T is as I thought," he muttered, as he moved away from Vallis House; "that dark spirit must be watched more narrowly. She must have taken Mary Napier for poor Ellen Neville. 'Tell George Neville the forsaken one hath cursed thee.' I think I can trace the poison now; but where shall I find an antidote? I had better see how affairs stand in that sad household before I venture on such delicate ground."

CHAPTER II.

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DR POWELL steered a direct course to Mowbray. Finding Colonel Neville had not left his room throughout the day, the Doctor hesitated on his way to his apartment. On entering his patient's room, he found him reclining in a large chair, with his face buried in his hands, unheeding the wistful glances of his daughter, who sat opposite to him, and whose earnest eyes were turned ever towards him, to notice if an opportunity offered for an exercise of her gentle untiring affection ; but the father seemed to hide his face from her ; she had no encouragement to attempt to overcome his taciturn and gloomy mood. Seeing how matters were, Dr Powell intimated to Ellen that he wished to be alone with his patient ; and when Ellen had left

the room, he notified his presence by directly addressing his suffering companion.

Colonel Neville looked up, casting a gloomy, weary eye upon his visiter. His face was shrunk and emaciated; deep furrows were on the once high commanding forehead: it was a noble wreck, not stranded, yet exposed to a severe tempest.

"You see me where you left me, Powell," he said: "I have had a bad day; I am nervous and ill, but you can do nothing for me."

"You are better than you were a month ago; and if you could rouse yourself, and grow interested in things around you, such healthy excitement would do you much good," was the answer.

"Better than I was a month ago! How little can you understand me! True, the intellect about the time you mention had but one frail ember that was not extinct: you have fanned it, and from apathy have restored me to the torture and bitterness of memory,—and you say I am better! I can grow interested in things around me?—the idea is hopeless and impossible—the past and the present curse me. Can occupation teach me to forget this stern reality? Can excitement deaden the sting of that viper which guilt fixes in the breast?"

Dr Powell sat for some time in a musing attitude, as if undecided in his course ; at last he said :—

“The present has no power to curse whilst the means are reserved to us to crush the evil from which we suffer. The way is simple,—the mind hath always power to gather peace around it. Why should we give up the present to the future ? Has the present no high demand ? Happiness, like virtue, consists not in rest, but in action ; it is found rather in the pursuit, than in the attainment, of an end ; for though the death of the quarry is the purpose of the sport, when this purpose is accomplished, the sport is over. Your great misfortune is, that you take pains to make yourself miserable, from indulging in thoughts which irritate rather than console you. When in trouble, anticipation of further trouble multiplies the burdens which oppress us. We overtax nature with our own weaknesses ; we are so blind as to think that destiny (not ourselves) is to blame for the misfortunes which overtake us, and which are added to those necessary ills which beset us.”

Colonel Neville's manner intimated that he repelled the Doctor's rational reasoning ; strong, bitter

emotion tortured him, and he said, with dogged acrimony:—

“Words, ever words. I know that I am reaping the fruits of my own errors, and that those errors may be dated to the time I sacrificed duty for pleasure. I am sensible of my shame. Can words blot it from the register *here?*” and he clutched his forehead with his hand as he threw himself back in his couch, and relapsed into his former taciturnity.

Dr Powell looked sadly grieved; he leant forward, and remarked with a mild, persuasive voice, “In the words of Coleridge, I would remind you that—

‘The strongest plume in wisdom’s wing  
Is memory of past folly.’

And that with our poor finite understanding (tyrannized over by warring passions and impetuous impulses) error does more to guide us in the path to wisdom than the virtuous admonitions of the most moral monitor.”

“Speak not of peace,” cried the old man in tones of despair; “my boy at the gallows-tree!—she said so; that dark fiery spirit that crosses my

path upon the hill and in the vale, and to whose presence I am fascinated, like the moth to the candle. She would tear my pride from me ; topple down the worldly consequence of the Nevilles. The balance is yet to be struck,—so she assures me. She summons me to her presence, and I obey, to hear her curses and her hate, because if I did not, she would deliver William up to justice. Can there be peace, then, for me ? Can it come, think you, to a heart seared, smitten, scourged like mine ?”

“ Who is she ? to whom do you allude ?” asked Dr Powell, seeing now an opportunity to touch upon a subject which, he was aware, was of so momentous an importance at Mowbray.

“ I know not, nor can I account for her enmity to me and mine,” was the answer. “ She is mad, but the expression of this mental scourge is destructive to my peace.”

Dr Powell gazed sadly on his suffering companion, and said :—

“ When George Neville was some two-and-twenty years of age, he visited the sunny shores of Italy. After a short sojourn in that dreamy clime, he became, so I have heard, enamoured of one of

Italy's most attractive daughters. She returned his affection, or his passion, and bartered her fair fame for love. He fled with her, bearing a feigned name, and lived a while at the Isle of Cyprus,— 't was said in a fit of jealousy he deserted her. The tale which followed may have been embellished through the hands it passed. Enough, she thought herself betrayed ; her love was fierce,—she *forgot not*. During a long period, she suffered for a crime to which George Neville furnished the temptation, and he has lived to learn that that passion which he led to sin, when scorned, kindled the fires of hate."

Whilst Dr Powell was speaking, it was evident that his words had a bitter and astounding effect upon his listener. His frame was convulsed,—his hand was passed across his brow ; shame, surprise, fear, came over his countenance ; and when the last sentence fell, he started forward, and cried with a voice of agony :—


"Madalena—no ; *she* is dead ; 't is her spirit that haunts me. A cursed destiny——"

"She lives ; her wild words, her bitter hate, have sounded in your ears. Colonel Neville, beware ; your life is not safe in her presence ;" but

Dr Powell's last words fell on a senseless ear. The enfeebled man's own dark thoughts overflowed the seat of reason, leaving an intervening shadow, black as night, between it and memory.

Over the scene which followed this disclosure of Dr Powell's I must draw a veil. Ellen had been summoned; and she was gently informed that the reason of her parent's state arose from *the subject* to which her own mind had become so sadly familiar. Her brother had returned to England; he was at S——, but he had not sought an interview with her; she resolved to request one with him. She would endure the torture of suspense no longer; she would see him, know all, and decide if it was possible to release her father and herself from their present sad position. That very night a note was despatched by Ellen to her brother, requesting an interview on the morrow, and fixing on the summer-house by Roland's cliff as the place of rendezvous.

Ellen was true to her appointment, her face grave and colourless; high resolve and resolution were stamped upon it. One would have said that natural impulse was quite curbed, dismissed, had she not occasionally compressed her lips, and





held her hand upon her bosom, to compel emotion to obey the stern injunctions of reason.

William Neville came; there is no greater difference between light and darkness than in those traits which mark the aspect of innocence and guilt. When her brother entered the room in which Ellen stood, her eyes were bent upon him with interest and affection, in spite of the serious nature of her thoughts. The air of purity and feeling contrasted strangely with the sullen and degraded look of her brother; that silent scrutiny distressed her. With difficulty she exercised sufficient control over her emotions to enable her to follow up her purpose.

"You have returned," she said, for he spake not; "William, I expected you would have sought me with a disposition to allay my uneasiness. Why have you not replied to my earnest appeals to you to confide more implicitly in me?"

"I should have thought you would thank me for delaying an explanation as long as possible," he said; and as if ashamed of even an indirect allusion to *the subject*, his eye sank before hers. Ellen understood him:—


"Do not shun my glance, William," she ob-

served; "I am not come to speak my horror nor my indignation. Circumstances and positions are altered now. There was a time when I fondly thought my brother's love would be the guardian of my peace and happiness; but so bright a thought, with others I had hoped to treasure up, is gone from me. Beyond my father's release from present sad distress, and your redemption from a life of infamy, I have no thought; therefore speak confidently, William; trust, at this hour, will prove our best defence."

"I cannot say more than I have said," he answered moodily. "Must I repeat that the family name, its credit and consideration, are at the mercy of that man? My own safety, my life, such is his power; and vengeance or forbearance rests on your decision."

Ellen gazed fixedly on her brother; perhaps she thought at the moment how very selfish the heart of evil was; and then she said:—

"Can *I* preserve our ancient name from shame, once tarnished, though the act which does it be concealed from the world's eye? Is there not a lever planted at its base which must ultimately topple it headlong? Has not the *necessity* of a



bitter sacrifice to preserve it from present shame, already crushed out the spirit of its honour?"

Though Neville's mind was corrupted, he experienced bitter emotion. Ellen's love for him had kept a spark of nature alive. He remembered many an act of love this unselfish girl had performed to comfort him,—many a deed of magnanimity; and, as feeling dragged its slow way towards his soul, sympathy partially gleamed through the thorns and briars which his dissolute life had caused to grow up within, and he sought to comfort her. She thought afterward how much the society he frequented must have hoodwinked his delicacy; for the tone of his comforting was,—

"Are my suspicions correct, Ellen? Are your affections fixed on Charles Napier?—if so, I must tell you....."

Ellen started as her brother mentioned Napier's name: for once this hour her face was crimson; and now she checked him by saying, with sudden impetuosity:—

"If you would not increase my torture a thousand-fold, hold *his* name sacred. *He* would not—but, no; I will not speak of *him*. Thought must take another direction now, or, William, you will drive

me mad. Alas ! why should you scourge me thus ?”

Ellen’s fortitude had deserted her ; she would not—she could not—curb her emotion.

“I scourge you !” cried Neville, feeling his shame, and venting his feelings on others, not himself ; “ then thank my father ; for my errors are the consequence of his unjust conduct towards me. Kindness,—prudence would have saved me ; harshness plunged me into crime. Cast as a Pariah dog upon the world, without a warning voice,—a friend to counsel me, I was fair game for the black-leg and swindler. For years before the outbreak between my father and myself, I was the petted and indulged son. Every fancy was gratified,—every foolish wish forestalled ; and thus the keen sensations for pleasures and amusements, which society creates for youths situated as I was, became a governing impulse. I fell. In those tastes to which, as a boy, I was allowed to resign myself, there are fallacies, Ellen, which only experience can detect ; but it is not always that experience itself can destroy the influence these fallacies obtain over the passions. Society flattered my foibles ; they were accounted anything but wrong. The world loves the pros-

perous, be he never so evil, and through its favour I learnt the way to laugh at wrong. Yet my heart, Ellen, is not seared to natural affection. I love the old man, our father. Many a time within these last three years I would have crept to Mowbray on my knees to have received his pardon ; *but I could not*,—I cannot, but through you ; but do not think I am indifferent to your grief. I swear to you, Ellen, I suffer horrible torture, though you think I am callous and cold.”


Ellen felt the first part of her brother’s speech to be bitter and extravagant ; but as he intimated, in a voice she felt to be sincere, that he yearned for his father’s forgiveness, the current of her feelings changed : she absolved him of cruelty towards herself, and, taking his hand in both her own, she cried with generous emotion :—

“ Then all is not lost. Oh ! William, our father ; God help him !—the burden on his heart is heavy. He is different now to what he was two months ago : then a mental gloom had all but hidden the sad reality from his thought. Night after night I sat by his couch, and saw his cheek grow wan ; and yet one light arose from out the darkness, and consecrated the prayer—the parent’s thrilling prayer

of pardon from God, and mercy for the erring son. But now, William, another change has come: the mental faculties are restored; but he is incapable of indulging in even one fleeting thought that could yield him comfort. Some horror, some dark fear alone possesses his mind: in some way you are connected with it; for in his night fevers I have heard him cry: 'Why, my son, art thou absent from me at this hour?' Go then to him;" and Ellen here moved as if she would accompany her brother home. "Slake this craving for your presence. I will be by you with all my old affection to cheer and animate you in so dear a task; even sorrow and misfortune will die out, if we labour to soften a parent's wo," and she drew her brother towards the door.

"Stop, Ellen, stop!" he cried; "you forget the act which opens the doors of Mowbray for me."

"True," replied Ellen; "true!" and she sank back into her seat. The expression of her face was quite changed now; it had been radiant with generosity and sensibility. Wearily she spake:—"The thought deprives me of the power of reflection," and she leant back upon her seat, and her eyes closed. One vast solitude was before her,—



so black and terrible that she could not gaze upon it. Her heart urged many bitter questions to her. She had thought her intercourse with it was at an end. Now she found it otherwise.....“Meet me here at noon to-morrow,” she said, rousing herself; “as yet I cannot view clearly this terrible business. Your restoration to my father’s heart has been the warm ambition of my soul for four long years; but the means through which this much-desired object can be ensured curdle my life’s blood. Leave me now; however I may decide, attribute not my hesitation to self-concern. There is *one* whom I must question; if he is with me, I will do your bidding. Hush!” she said solemnly, as her brother was about to speak. “At this moment I am alarmed to think what you might say. My startled soul must seek Divine assistance. His aid is its sole stay.”

Neville turned from her without attempting to address her. Ellen had not moved from her seat, but was about to do so, when she heard a quick step approaching from without. She concluded her brother was returning, and an anxious gaze was bent upon the entrance: much to her horror he saw Wilton approaching her. She would have called

on her brother to return, when the idea occurred that she might perhaps gain something by pleading to Wilton, to explain to him an authority which her father had vested in her hands, and then, by throwing herself on his generosity, possibly save her brother and herself. Poor Ellen! as well look for safety on the toppling rock, or comfort in the howling wilderness, as for forbearance from such as him. However, she had resolved on the attempt; and, therefore, rising with difficulty from her seat, as he stood before her, she said:—

“ Mr Wilton, I have been made conscious of your views in reference to myself; that you hold my brother in your power, and bargain with a secret that touches his reputation, if not his life, for my hand in marriage. Until this morning, I had believed that the authority you held over my brother originated from pecuniary obligations on his part towards you; and I have obtained my father’s sanction to release my brother from such engagements, even did they compass one-half of all he possesses in this world.”

She paused, as if in difficulty for words. “ My brother, I much fear, is guilty of many errors—



many lawless acts ; but I do not believe him guilty of a deed that would jeopardize his life in the eye of the law. I rather conclude, you must excuse my plainness, that you, who have been his guide and the master-spirit in deeds which tarnish his honour, have so perplexed and entangled him in reference to one act, perchance more lawless than the rest, that he is forced to bear a responsibility which should be mutually borne. Your intimate connexion with him, your career together, your onward, united march in error, warrant my opinion, and hourly events stamp it with reality."

Again, Ellen paused. In an altered voice, it was quivering and tremulous, she resumed :—" You must be conscious that circumstances have occurred to raise a formidable barrier between us. I will not anger your pride by entering into particulars ; enough that every light and energy of my being rebels against the contract you seek to consummate. Listen then to the voice of prudence, and gain a victory over feelings which can only arise from some dark, hidden, and cruel desire of vengeance. Suppress these evil thoughts, and accept the advantages I am authorized to tender you, and we shall then be your debtor. At my father's hands you

have met with kindness and affection. You know it was not his fault that you were separated from us. Think of these things, and renounce a design which would wither the roof-tree that sheltered your youth, and generously yielded you no common happiness."

As Ellen Neville spoke, her last hope was in her words, and suffused her mourning countenance with a sweet dignity and earnestness. It was some minutes before her listener could frame his reply. Twice he strode through the room, and he muttered some bitter words. At last he paused in his wrath, and said:—"Talk not of wealth, Ellen Neville!—My soul is less mercenary than you deem. Were the earth from this to Mowbray changed to gold, and tendered me for my claim upon you, I would not accept it. From an early day, a union with you has been my aim. Your hand once mine, and the memories of bitterness between your father and myself will be effaced; and your brother's life preserved. Yes! I will turn their present discomfort to happiness, and yield to you the merit of the tutor. Can I not thus make atonement? If not, ascribe some sterner duty, and you shall see how

zealously I will perform it....Ellen, times were when that soft hand nestled confidently in mine." And he attempted to take the hand nearest him, which hung by her side.

This bold act restored Ellen's courage. "And thus you resolve to cheat yourself," she said firmly. "You pretend not to comprehend my meaning. Must I repeat that our paths are widely separate? I feel it in my heart and brain. The very thought scares me. A voice beyond the grave prohibits it. Were you the noblest of God's creatures, I should feel the same. Our sympathies might once have been united by the bonds of friendship—by love, never!"

Seeing he was about to speak, she further said,—  
"You have asked me to impose a duty on you. I will. Restore my father to his former health and happiness. Take the blighting hand of ruthless persecution from his heart. Give honour, peace, and a good name to my brother." Here she looked steadily into his countenance. "And bring poor Inez Napier's husband to her arms!"

He bore her scrutiny with unruffled mien, answering,—  
"The past cannot be recalled. He who errs not is a good man; and he who reaps experi-

ence and wisdom from his error deserves consideration. Taunt me not, or you will ruffle a temper which has become stern and arbitrary from strife with a world wherein honour is vaunted as an expedient to conceal the want of it. I have regrets; you can turn them to virtues!"

He gazed for a minute on her; but he saw scorn on her lip; and then he said moodily,—“Must the storm come?—Do you despise the succour which I tender?—I have vowed, and my vow shall be observed; you shall be mine!—Shrink not from me!—The desperate fight desperately. The fate of your house is in your hands—its honour and dignity rest on your decision!”


“I believe your words are as artificial as your power,” answered Ellen, roused by his implied threat. “Why not leave us as we are, then?—Why should you thus persecute us?—We have been guilty of no ill to you!—You must be aware that we have never harmed you?”

“No ill, Miss Neville!” cried Wilton, now roused to passion, for Ellen’s manner, even more than her words, stung his worldly pride. “Do scorn, contempt, your present haughty bearing,

rank as nothing?—Am I a block of marble—a stone—that I should be insensible to your father's oft-spoken mockery—and now yours? Little do you know the nature of a man who holds authority like mine, to beard me thus. I shall be passive for a time—a very short time; and if you adhere to your present opinions, I shall regard the peace of none, for none regard mine!”

Poor Ellen, her courage could barely sustain her. Her face was pale and agitated. She had obtained a certain moral victory over the audacious man who stood before her. This she saw. And if her nerve failed her now, she should be quite at his mercy. With her hand upon her bosom, to still her heart's sickening throb, she summoned strength to say, in her former collected manner, “There is One who has a higher claim upon me than you are disposed to recognise. He gives and He takes away; and is ever alike merciful and just. To Him I submit my cause; and the faith I have in his justice inspires the conviction, that I shall find a Protector in the hour of need.” She then passed him, with a mien that daunted even his hardihood, and slowly paced the homeward path.

A dark and angry expression rested on Wilton's face as his eye followed Ellen's retreating form. Then observing a small bouquet, which must have dropped from her person, he stooped and picked it up, observing,—“ My dainty one, let us see if you have the old taste still? Yes; violets, a primrose, and a sprig of jasmine; simple enough. She was always fond of these tiny things!” He held them in his hand. His mood had changed. He stood reflecting awhile. “ She is changed!” he said,—“ A fitter mate for me, in her pride and dignity, than if she had preserved her former character; but she thinks to foil me; we shall see. I must own I stand on slippery ground; she knows it too; her words prove that: however, I will be beforehand with evil fortune. I must strike sharp and home: once weave my fate with hers, then I will try the New World, and perhaps rise to eminence. Yes, eminence!—*there*, there is no such vivid solicitude about a name; the bastard is not cursed with the sneer and obloquy of society; the child has not to atone for the parents' fault. Birth sets no fashion there; holds no high court, nor senseless state: success is everything,—honour, name, position;—I can command all. Strong in will, in confidence,



and intellect, the future with intelligent promise rises before me."

"Now for the brother," pursued Wilton, as he passed the outer boundary of the place; "the fellow is as weak and unstable as a child—there is no knowing how to take him."

He retreated cautiously and warily, as he did not particularly wish to be seen in the neighbourhood. By a clump of firs, not far from the summer-house, he found William Neville impatiently awaiting him. A dark red spot was on his cheek, and there was that in the eye which pretty plainly told how bitterly the morning's events had agitated him, or how much his feelings rebelled against the deed he had been forced to subscribe to,—Wilton's interview with Ellen. They eyed each other suspiciously; Wilton, his companion with mistrust; Neville, with ill-suppressed anger: the former was the first to speak,—

"In a month this affair must be arranged," he said.

"How sped the interview?" asked Neville, in a tone of biting sarcasm.

"There is peace between us—you know my gift of persuasion, and here is my warrant for my words,"

replied Wilton, drawing forth the bouquet from his bosom.

"You lie!" answered Neville, passionately striking the flowers from his hand; "Ellen is no changeling."

Wilton gazed fixedly at his companion, and for a moment a fiery glance was in his eye.

"You are courteous, Neville," he said, coolly: "a word of advice; give free latitude to your tongue, if the exercise pleases you; but put a guard on your actions—there's a good fellow. You pay your sister a compliment at my expense; it is more than I can do to you. With regard to her it matters not; in this business I will not allow you to sun yourself in the light of her example."

"None of your threats here," cried Neville, evidently half-mad from humiliation, rendered ten times more acute from what he had that morning passed through; "by this hill-side I am your equal. Have a care, or I will add something to give weight to the home-truths you have heard in the house yonder."

"Oh, as to that we are quit already; and as Ellen has the charge of your mind to-day,—'tis never in your own keeping long, you know,—why, you




must excuse me if I confounded identities, and discussed the nature of the bond." It was a false stroke of policy on Wilton's part. He thought to brow-beat Neville. Little could he have surmised the secret of his companion's thoughts at this moment. They were dark, blood-stained, and lawless. During the time he had sat waiting for his *friend*, he had pondered over what had passed between him and Ellen, and had reflected too on his gross cruelty in allowing Wilton to intrude upon her, whilst he knew she was so sadly prostrated. He had consequently resolved to plot to rid her of this scourge to her happiness, till his mind was one bitter, brooding, dangerous thought. These things Wilton guessed not; he meant merely to curb Neville's ill temper by showing him he was utterly in his power, as now his sister knew all. He miscalculated the effect of this false assertion. Neville, at the idea of his sister's hearing Wilton's version of *the tale*,—at the thought that she believed, and was now bearing to her stricken father's ears her belief that he was more sinning, base, and vile than he really was, was maddening. All authority over him was at an end; he retreated no more; he crouched, but it was for a fatal spring. "Dis-

honourable villain," he cried, "and you have done this after swearing secrecy ! You have sprung the mine with your own hand, and nothing now shall shield you from my vengeance ; draw, dog draw !" and with his clenched fist he struck him madly in the face ; " your blood or mine shall close a dread account ; draw, or by heaven I will stab you to the heart." And with a massive sword-stick (weapons he and Wilton never moved from home without, things made in France on their own design, dangerous and formidable articles in lawless hands), he lunged wildly at him.

Wilton was so used to Neville's desperate and uncertain moods, that he would not have noticed the language. More than once within this past month, since Neville's humiliation at Paris, he had spoken almost as violently, thinking, no doubt, to fix a quarrel on his companion ; but when the blow fell, and he found it accompanied by an attitude and resolution of such unmistakable meaning, he tore his blade from its sheath, and lunged fiercely, crying,—“ Mad fool you have sealed your doom !”

Neville avoided the thrust ; and then he became the assailant ; and so dire was his purpose,—such fiery vehemence did he display,—that Wilton was



compelled to put forth his utmost skill to save himself from being pierced to the heart. The memories of wrongs and miseries endured for years seemed now to nerve with more than human desperation the ruthless assailant's arm. Of personal concern he had no thought; his only object was, reckless of consequences, to reach the life-spring of his foe. Wilton, now conscious of the danger of allowing his passions to usurp an undue ascendancy, became comparatively cool; he felt Neville's purpose; his desire was to frustrate it, which he did by standing warily on the defensive, trusting to a steady guard.....Neville paused—he dashed the perspiration from his eyelids, which was almost blinding him, and then cried, in the fury of his unabated wrath:—"For years I have been the victim of your craft and cunning, but now your hour is come, or my release; one of the two shall never leave this spot alive." And with daring determination he renewed the encounter.....

Neville paused once more; the reason was obvious; his strength was entirely expended—no human arm, with so awkward a weapon, could have longer sustained an assault so furious. Wilton saw this, and quickly became the attacking

party; he was equally daring, and possessed more skill. Only for a short time Neville held his ground; at last he was compelled to give way; a false step, and in a moment he was at his fierce opponent's mercy. Heated by exertion and excited by passions which once roused were of a fierce malignant nature, Wilton seemed to lose sight of the fact that, in taking Neville's life, he was marring his own dark schemes. In the fury of the moment, all these personal considerations were thrust aside, his blade was at the chest of the prostrate man, when an imperious hand was laid upon his arm, and his weapon was wrenched from his grasp before he could move. So sudden had been the interference, and a voice, stern, deep, and emphatic thundered the terrible accusation in his ear:—"Wouldst thou commit a *second* murder?" Hardly had these words been spoken, before the utterer of them bent over Neville, and said:—"This hour's experience should deliver you from evil. Rise, William Neville, and henceforth regard him you have trusted in the light of his natural baseness."

He drew back, and the next instant Ellen Neville had cast herself between her brother and his intended murderer. Her hat was gone; her dark

hair was streaming over her shoulders; emotion, deep, wild, and agonizing had given an almost unearthly light to her eye, her noble courage investing her with quite a mysterious dignity. Fronting the ruthless Wilton, her first words were:—

“Your guilt has done the work of justice on you; I know you now.”

Her glance of high contempt spoke the rest; and then her countenance settled to a partial calm, shadowed by horror. Neville had risen: something of terror and surprise appeared in the blanched face, and he did not move; but as this feeling waned, he turned to the individual who had saved his life, and who had withdrawn a few paces, and stood with a stern reserve scanning the group before him, and said,—

“Men would say you had done me service, but I can scarcely thank you.”

“Is life so worthless a thing to you, Mr Neville? Ripe in sin and guilt, have you no thought of the value of a respite between you and the awful future?”

“Thank her,” he added, pointing to Ellen; “from you I can receive no thanks.”

Wilton for a moment had stood irresolute; with

all his daring nerve, there had been something in the commanding air and bearing of that mysterious person, who seemed ever near to place himself between him and the ruthlessness of his will, that was to him almost supernatural. He had cowered, as the fiercest spirits do, when subject to the inner dread which evil acts engender. His fury was awed, but it had not subsided; and now Neville stood unhurt before him, and the stranger's words had given new direction to his thoughts, he laughed scoffingly, as he said:—

“You have a life given you on easy terms; make better use of it, William Neville, than you have done latterly. You are now aware that your will to injure me is impotent. We will discuss this matter in more fitting time and place, Miss Neville.”

“By Heaven! if you address a word to her, I will stab you to the heart!” cried Neville, grasping his blade and springing passionately towards Wilton.

Wilton's eye was on Ellen.

“You see,” he said,—but he was interrupted by her.

“This conduct is unseemly and outrageous. Are you both so selfish and wayward, that you must



bandy threats before one whose pity is even greater than her scorn? Leave us," she added, answering Wilton's gaze with a glance of noble indignation; "I cannot hold speech with a man whose heart a minute since was seared with the fell desire to murder."

Wilton answered not; there was that in the bearing of the pure being before him, which his proud spirit would have combated, but it could not. He left the group, without even noticing, by taunt or angry word, the man who had handled him so roughly. William Neville, too, was far from being at ease in Ellen's presence; the direst bitterness of shame was upon him. When Wilton had retired, the individual, who had taken so valuable a part in this sad business, drew near to Ellen, and said:—

"I may not tarry longer here, I will send you escort; until it arrives, remain under your brother's care;" and, without waiting a reply, he moved off hastily in the direction of Mowbray House.

"*Who* is that man?" cried Ellen to her brother; "his voice, his manner, his very gestures, exercise a strange authority over me. When I was hastening to prevent that dreadful struggle, I met him—

I implored his assistance. He spoke to me as if he was speaking to a dear friend; and when he bounded off to comply with my prayer, I felt I could have trusted him with my life. *Who* can he be? He is not what he seems."

"His name is Pearson; Charles Napier's good genius, Ellen, they call him hereabout." He was silent for a few moments, and then with a sickening attempt at calmness, he said:—

"I can hardly thank you, Ellen, for my life; better *he* had fulfilled his purpose; then you would have been free."

Since Wilton's departure, Ellen's manner had changed. She gazed into her brother's face with affection, and now answered,—

"Oh! William, speak not thus. Join with me in gratitude to God that your life is preserved. Think of the frightful moment you have just known, that but for His care you might have stood in His presence in your sin and guilt. No act of violence can release me from the misery I experience; no intention, however generous, sanctions a lawless deed."

Neville's eye sank before his sister's earnest gaze. Minds more evil than his lose their confi-



dence before the fair majesty of virtue ; agitation and shame made him mute. Then, suddenly yielding to emotion he could not longer suppress, his head sank upon her shoulder, and this man of many evil deeds wept bitterly.

"You know all," were his first words ; "now the secret of his authority is explained."

"I know nothing," Ellen summoned strength to say ; and she shuddered at the question, for it implied horror. "All I comprehend is, that there is bitter enmity between you and that daring, vicious man ; and the words spoken prove that he reigns over you through an evil power,—the idea is indeed terrible."

"What could have been his motive for the lie he told me?" muttered Neville ; and again he relapsed into a gloomy bitterness. Rousing himself, he said :—

"Sit here by me, Ellen ; I will explain everything : in duty to both of us, I will not longer conceal matters from you."

"Not to-day, not to-day, dear brother," answered Ellen, trembling violently ; "I have not strength : this morning's excitement has sadly affected me. My reason seems on the brink of

overthrow : to-morrow let us meet ; to-night I will reflect, if possible."

"So be it," said Neville, gloomily ; and, as if fearing to trust himself to say more, he turned abruptly away, taking an opposite path to the one Wilton had.

Ellen, on approaching home, met Dr Powell, who was full of alarm on her account, for he had met Wilton on his road to Mowbray, and instinctively felt that his presence there foreboded no good. As they approached the mansion, he said :—


"I feel much solicitude and anxiety on your account." Then, as if he had suddenly recollected a something he had forgotten, he remarked,—  
"The excitement of the past half-hour has driven a matter of moment from my mind. It has suddenly occurred to me, that I have a duty to perform in introducing your new attendant to your notice. You will recollect, Miss Neville"—(seeing Ellen evince surprise)—"I quite convinced you last night, that as Fanny was to leave you, you would be incapable of performing your arduous duties unaided ; and, after some hesitation, you consented to accept the services of a person I could confidently recommend. She is already at Mowbray. You

will find her an individual quite superior to her present position. However, I feel the badge of servitude will not press very heavily upon her ; and, I am convinced, you will find her devoted to your interests."

CHAPTER III.

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As Ellen Neville seemed more than partially assured of the sad position in which her brother and the Neville interests were placed, and that to her belonged the ability of preserving him and the family name from shame, it would appear that her soul gained courage even from the bitterness of the fate that awaited her. Her mind was full of a noble, generous purpose. *He* was her brother ; at the expense of her own happiness she would strive to save him from the odium and obloquy, perhaps punishment, which his own acts had entailed upon him. The old man whom she had just left, as she now retired to her room, whose head was silvered through affliction, and whose heart vibrated in so bitter, irrepressible a dread of shame and dishonour, from the same source from which her concern for her brother arose, was her father ; he merited care




and devotion. He had been ever good and generous to her ; and should she not step forward, at even the sacrifice of self, and dissipate the fears and torments which surrounded him, and appease that yearning of his soul, a reconciliation with his son ?

After having visited her father, Ellen sought quiet in her own room. Though her step was uncertain, the expression of her face spoke of pure, exalted resolution, as she sat down upon a sofa, and rested her throbbing temples upon her hands ; and here, with her mental eye unfilmed, she contemplated things as they were, and strove to convince herself that the imperious necessity to which she must subscribe was authorized as much by reason as by filial affection. Apart from the couch on which Ellen reclined, her new attendant (the person introduced by Dr Powell) stood in a grave, melancholy attitude. Her arms were folded across her breast ; her eyes were downcast, and there was much thoughtful sweetness in the countenance. This individual appeared about Ellen Neville's own age ; and in spite of her plain attire, her figure was remarkable for its grace and elegance. Her hair, which was glossy and dark, was drawn back in close bands, leaving a face of singular

delicacy, gentleness, and refinement of expression exposed to view. It could be seen at a glance that this person had neither the air nor manner of one who had been educated in servitude; her bearing would have been distinguished from its simplicity and ease in the society of the most elegant and high-born. It was evident that Ellen's manner, which intimated that she laboured under deep and expressive emotion, awakened the stranger's warmest sympathies. The shade of touching pensiveness, not unassociated with pain, which rested on her countenance, as her eye dwelt ever on Ellen's form, betrayed an evidence of a warmer sentiment than even friendly interest; still the emotion was suppressed, for that intelligent glance of sensibility was often hastily withdrawn, and then diffidence and timidity usurped the external semblance of sympathy and concern.

From the stillness which reigned in her apartment, Ellen Neville was no doubt unconscious of this female's presence. She must have believed that she was alone. She had at this time taken the resolution which I have explained,—an heroic, exalted act,—and then this noble, unselfish heart, bent with folded hands, and with low, quivering



voice, which gained force and sentiment as she proceeded, petitioned that Power to which she could alone look for support, for strength to endure her burden, and courage to execute the stern behests of duty. Insensibly the first shades of evening had blended into twilight, and the moon's soft, mysterious rays (as if they loved life much) came on with the waning of the day, to show us on this darkened earth where to look for the eternal light of love. It was an hour well fitted for this sorrowing child to look up to Him and ask for guidance. At first, Ellen's voice was low and tremulous ; but as her exalted mind gave forth its hope, and reposed it with Him, the Lord of *all* hope and life, her tones were imbued with vigour, the former languor disappeared, and a soft glow, like the first gleam of sunrise on the darkened earth, tinted the colourless cheek.

Had Ellen's mind not been so truly occupied in the exercise of devotion, she would have heard a deep sob escape from a person near her. She would have seen that another had joined her in her holy exercise, — that an eye of deep sensibility and truth rested on her, speaking of innocent confidence and affection. Ellen was at

first unconscious of an intruder on her privacy ; but when she moved to rise from her lowly attitude, she started from affright and dismay as a trembling hand was placed within hers. A moment and Ellen's astonishment passed, as she seemed to recognise the individual by her, and she resigned the hand the stranger held to her, which was carried with touching grace to the lip, and then a low sweet voice said :—

“ You have prayed for a friend. I have given my life to you ; I have pledged it to your service here before our God ; will you accept a love which shall console you under the strange evil perplexities which beset you ? ”

The speaker was still kneeling as she finished her remark : there was something almost saint-like and angelic in the expression of her countenance. Ellen was not less struck by the words she had heard than the attitude of the suppliant. For a time her eyes were riveted in astonishment upon her ; then she said, in her own sweet, serious manner :—

“ No mind is wholly exempt from superstition. Your sudden speech, the singularity of your presence, your countenance so radiant with purity and



goodness, would almost lead me to the belief that I am even now suffering from an illusion consequent on unstrung nerves. Speak, I implore you ; tell me who you are who gaze upon me with an eye of such pure, expressive emotion !”

“Lady,” was the answer, in a low, quivering voice, “I would be your friend now and for ever. I would soothe your sorrow, and protect you from further anguish : accept my devotion. The interest of the angels in heaven who watch over you is not more unselfish than that which influences my conduct.”

“Strange words, strange and bewildering,” said Ellen slowly : “others might be incredulous, but I am not ; we will be friends. My heart yearns for woman’s sympathy ; I will place implicit faith in you.”

“You give me *life* to evince a woman’s worship, to perform a sister’s duty.” The emphasis, the tone, the sentiment, as these words fell, assured Ellen that the sun of woman’s devotion, bright as heaven’s own light which hallowed this touching scene, was shed over her ; but Ellen would have deeply sorrowed had she known that over the heart from which this light to her came, loomed soli-

tude and destitution. Now the demeanour of the stranger reassumed its diffident and retiring character. She had, it seemed, unconsciously yielded to the guidance of acute sensibility ; and as she had plainly expressed her interest, she now stood apart with an air of ingenuousness which evidently appealed for extenuation, and excuse for her conduct. This Ellen Neville noticed ; and extending her hand towards her, said :—

“Come to me,—sit by me here. I will not intrude myself into your confidence : I will accept your friendship with gratitude ; let that be understood between us. You shall remain by me as long as you wish, with full powers to preserve unexplained your own and good Dr Powell’s motives.”

After a minute’s hesitation, her hand was taken with feeling of pain, evidently. She did not take the seat to which she had been invited, but said :—

“Our friend will think I have trespassed too far already, without availing myself of the privilege you so kindly extend towards me. My heart has overcome my reason once this evening ; I must now struggle to regain the self-possession which has played truant.” And then she added, after a

short pause : "The time will come when I will disburden my heart of its secret to you ; until then, care of you is my inspiration and my hope ;" and she suddenly retired, as if fearing to trust herself further.

Ellen sat for a time pondering on the singular character of the connexion which had been so suddenly brought about between her and the gentle being who had just left the room. Ellen thought she had never seen a person more elegant and attractive,—a manner and bearing more peculiarly graceful, nor listened to a voice of more thrilling sensibility and feeling. Ellen could not settle her ideas, for they followed so quickly on the track of each other, that reflection further mystified and confused her : she could only arrive at the supposition that Dr Powell, in his warm zeal, had confided her to the care and watchfulness of one on whom he could implicitly rely. But why the secrecy ?—and, too, that voice,—that interest so pathetically expressed, awakened old sensations. Yes ; Napier's affection,—that crushed and blighted joy, was inexplicably blended with this stranger's touching evidence of love for her. She could not prevent her mind from embracing the idea : " Poor Ellen !

perhaps 't were better to banish the fancy. Why augment your sorrow? Occupied as your thoughts must be with one harsh necessity, why mingle that past with your present?"

It was some time before Ellen's mind was recalled to the actual. At length, feeling the necessity of exertion, she left her seat, prepared to take her accustomed place by her parent's side. Her absence from him this day had been unusually prolonged; but he made no comment,—scarcely noticing, indeed, her anxious solicitude. Colonel Neville was reclining in the same chair Dr Powell found him in the night before. Ellen gazed with an eye of deep affection upon her father. The words, "Father, be comforted," sprang irresistibly from her lips; but he heeded them not,—he only said:—

"Sorrow, and shame, and dishonour are my burden. Oh! would that I could die!"

Ellen's heart beat quickly; but, leaning over him as her hand rested on his shoulder, she said, as calmly as she could:—

"You sadly need air and exercise. You would be better were you to leave your room; the fresh air would revive you."

"I cannot leave the house, my child," he said

querulously. "I dread that terrific voice; the sound of it tortures my inner soul."

Ellen was silent: every word, every act in and about Mowbray seemed to point to her, and ask, "if she could not find an antidote?"

Following up her usual custom at this hour of evening, Ellen took that "priceless book" in her hand, and, drawing a footstool to her father's side, she read in a low, grave voice, words which contained the secret of happiness beyond this present life. As she continued, her voice increased in volume and earnestness; and, it would appear, in striving to strengthen her father's mind, she found a medicine for her own malady.

At length the father's sealed lips opened:—

"It is good of you, my child, to devote your time thus to me," he said more calmly than usual. "You are indeed a blessing to me. But, Ellen, I cannot see the comfort you read of. Do you see it, my child? Over your young heart, oppressed as I know it is by outward things, does it throw a protecting shield against the horrors which crowd upon us?"

"My father," she answered, with deep earnestness, "fears sometimes shake the constancy of my

soul, and mental uneasiness enslaves the patience so necessary to uphold me to the true path of duty ; then I turn to this rich legacy with which God has dowered us, and *here* I am taught that happiness is in store for all who will accept it upon the terms prescribed. Those terms, my father, are a resignation to God's will, a reliance on His justice, blended with a grateful and a contrite heart."

Ellen feared to say more, for her father sighed deeply ; and shortly he said :—

"I have no fortitude, Ellen : religion has never formed the basis of my conduct. I once thought the mental gifts with which I was endowed were bestowed upon me that I might win merit, and obtain a high standing in the world's consideration. To be great amongst my fellows was my aim : the ambition exalted my social and worldly position for a time, but it outraged my God. And, Ellen, I have secrets in this heart of mine which I have not courage to disclose. You see I cannot shut my eyes to the world. My child, shame will fall upon us. You will live to blush when you hear your father's name."

"Oh ! say not so," cried Ellen eagerly, inter-

rupting his words. "Never, never! You are my father;" and, after a few moments, she added more calmly: "Your poor nerves are sadly shattered; your former vigour of mind impaired through physical infirmity, and now you reflect too acutely on things relative to my brother. Let us speak of him, my father; we aggravate our sorrows by concealing them from each other."

"Alas! my child," answered the father; "what can we say,—what hope express that is not forced back in a chilling form upon the heart almost as soon as it is uttered? Had I my son by me,—could I know that he was securely resting in the home of his father, I believe I could redeem my mind for the short time I have to live from its present morbid wretchedness."

As her father thus spake, Ellen rose, and then knelt upon the stool on which she had sat by his side, and, taking his hand, said:—

"No sacrifice, dear father, would be too great, presuming it restored my brother in safety to his home in contrition at your feet."

"None, my child," replied the old man, in a faltering voice; "but why agitate me by using

such hopeless expressions? So great a boon is beyond my hope—relief from shame and dishonour is denied me.”

Ellen strove to speak, but her tongue performed not the will of her mind. Noticing her unusual agitation, her father drew her caressingly to his bosom. This act of kindness was the filial inspiration. With an eye of unusual brightness, Ellen gazed into her parent's face and said:—

“My father, your prayer shall be fulfilled.”

After having spoken thus, Ellen retired from her father's room. She had acted as she had done, under the strong impulse of duty and compassion for her father, even before she knew the worst. She had given up everything,—more than life—she had given *self*; had disinherited her heart of even its common liberty. The night was advanced, but Ellen retired not to rest for a time. She conversed with her new attendant with tolerable composure: then, from sudden abstraction, it seemed Ellen wished to be alone. The writing-desk was now opened, and Ellen's time was occupied in perusing, and then destroying, many old familiar letters. They had been her silent friend for long. In them, and their interest in her son,



timent had found a sanctuary. She felt, as if *she was going a long journey*; they would be unsafe in her keeping. She was satisfied that she had no more to do with the life of heart; and she would, by this voluntary act, guard the innocence of friendship from disgrace. Then came forth some folds of writing in her own hand,—the music of the childhood's heart, blended with a maturer experience. For a time, Ellen pondered over these sheets, over the beautiful ideal, over the gushing thoughts of early youth, before life had been tinctured with bitterness. She had rent the pages of her friends; she had felt the sacrifice was due to their affections; she had put aside with the simple remark, "How vain!" the rich thoughts of a later day,—the transcript of a pure, reflecting mind. It was different with those young sweet thoughts of youth, emanating from the influence of the golden light of childhood's innocence on her heart. A hush came over her very breath, as her eye met that pure intelligence of an early day, and her hand rested on these writings; and from the expression of her countenance, it would seem that her soul said:—"Happy ignorance, how pure! especial mercy! from ye, in the night of affliction, I shall reap com-

fort!" These scraps were not destroyed; and now one other act must be performed. Napier's only letter to her came forth from its special resting-place, was enclosed in an envelope, and directed to him. The labour was over; she thought the past was blotted out; and now she knelt and intrusted the future to her God.

CHAPTER IV.

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THE hour came when Ellen Neville was called on to keep her appointment with her brother. The morning was cloudy, and rain threatened ; still she did not hesitate, and she repaired to the spot. William Neville was waiting for her. He gazed fixedly into her face, but he spoke not ; he was evidently ill at ease ; his eye was unnaturally bright ; his cheek wan and colourless. Few words could pass. More than once Ellen's hand was carried to her brow, as if she thought, by violent compression of the temples, to obtain an influence over her mind, or to still its excessive disquiet. As her brother remained silent, Ellen at length summoned courage to say :—


“Now tell me all, William ; speak openly, truly ; concealment will be a crime.”

Neville's lips were rigidly compressed ; he veiled his eyes with his hand, as he said, gloomily :—

“ You shall know all ;” and in a voice at times almost inarticulate, and then so low that it would seem he feared the walls should hear him, he disclosed matter which had proved the burden and curse of his existence for the last twelve months. The tale told left Ellen terrified and speechless. When he had finished, he looked up, wondering at his sister's silence ; but she had sunk back in a death-like swoon. He called wildly upon her ; knelt by her, swearing he was her murderer. If she would once more gaze upon him, he would free her from every engagement. After a time she revived. As consciousness returned, she clasped her brow with both her hands ; and her face was crimson : the mental torture was sufficient to thrust reason from its seat. Then she raised her head, and fixing a steady gaze upon her brother, as she took both his hands in her own, she said, in a solemn voice :—

“ Before the living God, who knoweth the secrets of all hearts, do you declare to me your innocence ?”

“ Innocent of foul intent, so help me Heaven !”



he answered. The voice was sincere, though the words came hoarsely from his lips.

She believed him, with the generous faith of a heart not prone to harbour unjust mistrust of any, and for a time there was an expression of intense relief in her countenance. She suppressed the lurking weakness of her woman nature, and with a tenderness of manner akin, but for its gravity, to that which she was wont to display in days of their youthful happiness, she kissed her brother's brow and said :—

“I will do all you wish. William, it will be *your task now* to alleviate our father's sorrows.” She could say so more. But his feelings agitated him so much, that he cried despairingly :—

“No ! it shall not be ; you shall never be thus sacrificed ; I would sooner kill you with my own hand !”

“Hush, brother,” she said, in a voice of deep pathos. “Love for my father is greater than my strength. I must acquire authority over emotion. Good intentions fortify the mind, and in time yield comfort to the heart.”

With great difficulty Ellen reached her home.

She had thought, as she approached the venerable mansion, so familiar, that she should soon have to bid a long, a last farewell to it for ever.

A gentle, earnest friend had watched for her arrival, and followed her with sympathizing eagerness to her apartment; then sought to remove the wet apparel: but Ellen would not have it so.

"Your hand burns like fire," said her kind friend, tenderly; "and your brow is bound with a deep crimson band: you are ill."

"Leave me for a few minutes," was the answer. "I must be alone; in a short space I will admit you."

Ellen then closed the door, standing a minute, as if to collect her faculties. Then her first act was to take a letter from her desk, and opening it, she grasped a pen with an intention of writing something, but she could not. Her lips murmured, "God bless you;" and then her hand rose wearily to her head. She strove again to fulfil her wish, with no better success. The purpose was abandoned; she closed the envelope hastily, as if she trembled for herself. Descending to the hall, she desired an attendant to summon a messenger for Vallis House. He came. She placed the letter

in his hands ; bade him deliver it surely ; then followed him to the door, and stood, watching him, reckless of the driving rain. A kind voice obtruded on this dangerous indulgence, and a hand was on her arm. The act recalled Ellen partially to herself. She turned, and moved for a few paces wearily, then tottering forward, would have fallen headlong, had not a friend supported her. Assistance was summoned. Ellen was borne to her room. The house was suddenly in dire alarm, for Ellen was there the idol of more hearts than one.

Fortunately, Dr Powell was in the house. He was quickly summoned ; and he entered the apartment in a grave, thoughtful manner, and took Ellen's hand in his.

"I am well ! I am quite well !" she cried, hysterically. "What ails you, Dr Powell, won't you believe me ?" Dr Powell mildly said, he would believe, but he did not. He still held her hand, and his eye was bent earnestly on her countenance.

Ellen attempted to rise. "I must go to my father," she remarked. Alas ! he stood directly by his poor child, gazing upon her with eye of bitter anguish.

"I am here, dear one," he summoned courage to say: "What ails my darling?" And he bent over her till his grey hairs mixed with the dark tresses of his child. Ellen wound her arms around his neck; her lips moved; the parent kiss again lent them speech, and out of the deep affection of her guileless heart, she summoned strength to say:—

"William returns, father; he will be restored to you: Father, will you give me your blessing?"

"Bless you, beloved child, with my heart and soul," cried the old man, quite hoarse from emotion. Then his eye rested wistfully on her, for the old fear was potent still. "What did you say?" he whispered, after a slight pause. "My boy return! When, oh when? *Can* such a mercy be vouchsafed me? Then this is your work, dear sympathizing angel: God's blessing light on your sweet head."

"This must not be," remarked Dr Powell, gravely; "I must interpose my authority. Colonel Neville, you must leave the room. Mrs Brown, for the love of Heaven be firm. Here, dear lady," he said, turning to the stranger, "have you strength to move Miss Neville; we must get these wet things away. I tell you," he whispered to the weeping housekeeper, "you must be collected; her mind is



on the very brink of overthrow;" and taking Colonel Neville by the arm, he led him from the apartment.

"Strive earnestly," pleaded Dr Powell to him, "to command yourself. Your daughter is suddenly and strangely smitten—your courage might preserve her. Shall the necessity be appealed to in vain?"

The father's glance was bent eagerly on the speaker. "I do not understand you, Powell," he said. "What has happened? I have seen nothing. She read to me as usual last night, in her own dear soothing way; she was well then! Has her attendance upon me overtaxed her strength?"

"Be calm, I entreat," was the answer. "Your mind is more collected to-day; strive to preserve its strength, that you may perform a father's duty. You shall know more anon;" and Dr Powell moved towards the door.


"Yes! go to my poor lamb," said the weeping father, as he sank upon a seat; "and when you are satisfied about the nature of her illness, come back to me, and let me know the worst."

\* \* \* \* \*

As Dr Powell surmised, delirium ensued. There was a sad earnest watch kept over the sufferer's

couch. The stranger, who had come amongst the inhabitants of Mowbray at so distressing a time, bestowed the utmost interest and care upon the stricken Ellen. Unknown as she was, her zeal was not restricted. With a resolution not to be shaken, and which, when the sympathies are acutely affected, it is difficult to resist, she constituted herself sole authority in the sick-room. She hung over Ellen with the tenderness of a sister; laying her burning forehead, and performing a nurse's duty with such unremitting watchfulness, that even Mrs Brown's nervous impatience was overawed.

Colonel Neville's distress had worn feeble nature out, and he had sunk into a slumber. Dr Powell took the sufferer's hand, and gazed earnestly into her once sweet face; but now how sadly changed! He observed that she started, trembled, that her eyes opened and glared around, expressing horror and fear; and then a minute afterwards, a smile far more beaming than he had lately seen upon her lip would light her countenance, and she would stretch forth her arms to clasp in them some phantom of the brain, some bright overhanging form; but as it eluded her grasp she cowered down, heaping the bedclothes over her head, and uttering a low



frightened wail. For a time all was still again ; then suddenly she would fling the burden from her face, and clasping her hands, would veil her eyes with them, and cry,—not in the voice of despair, hoarse and bitter as *it* comes,—not in the voice of gladness or content,—but in those quick sharp tones of insanity which words cannot present to the sense :—“ Oh, my father, you shall not suffer shame ; the honour of our house is preserved !” And then there was an admixture of wild and startling phrases,—Wilton, William Neville, Inez Napier’s names were blended, in disjointed form, vague and bewildering to the mind, as objects to the eye seen through an inverted lens. Presently, and the room echoed with delirious laughter, and words came which proved what had worn poor Ellen’s reason out. Sad indeed was the spectacle, sad to the ear as to the eye.....It would be a harrowing task to depict the character of poor Ellen’s state. Those who have watched by the bed-side of one stricken like her, will recollect well. Alas ! can the impression ever be erased ? The fierceness of this fierce scourge of nature ; that horror of the mind, when the soul’s wings are folded, and *it* is overridden with evils, from which it knows not a

moment's respite; and the thrill which followed the muttered words, as the lips betrayed matter which had been until this hour guardedly concealed.

Dr Powell had now learnt that Ellen had consented to sacrifice herself; and likewise something of William Neville's confession. His head had sunk upon his breast: he was lost in painful reverie. His attention was withdrawn from his own thoughts by a hand resting on his shoulder, and looking up, he found her whom he had introduced into Mowbray, in acute dismay, by him.

"In mercy, tell me," she said, in a hoarse whisper, "what mean those dark words. Names have been uttered, and deeds alluded to by that poor stricken girl, which fill me with alarm and dread."

Dr Powell took her hand, and led her gently from the room; and then he answered, in reply to her question:—

"You must summon your utmost fortitude. You have said your happiness consisted in preserving her from the fate which threatened her,—and a magnanimous resolution it is. But care of an un-

usual character is required, or our hopes will be vain,—our friend will die.”

“ I will not shrink from my task, though at the commencement my soul is silent from affright.” Such was the reply as the speaker re-entered the sick-chamber. Dr Powell followed, but not to remain : he had resolved on the line of conduct he was to pursue. Moving to Colonel Neville’s side, he roused him from his troubled sleep, and shortly told him that he had matter of the utmost consequence to discuss. Then, with friendly force he drew him away from the sick-couch. Rest had recruited the old man’s physical powers ; anxiety on his child’s account had roused him from the apathy in which he had some time lived. Dr Powell’s manner excited a painful curiosity.

“ What is it, Powell ? What is the matter ? ” he asked more than once, on his way to his room. On reaching the Colonel’s apartment, Dr Powell closed the door, and then drew the old man’s chair towards him.

“ Rest for a few minutes,” he said, calmly : “ collect your faculties.” He then took a seat by his companion’s side, and after a short pause, observed :—


“Two nights since I touched upon a matter which awoke old memories, and afforded you a clue to much that agitated and alarmed you. You remember, Colonel, our conversation?”

“I do, answered the old man, in a hollow voice; “why revert to it at such a time as this? You spoke to me of crime committed many years ago—past sorrows have atoned for it.”

“God’s providence is no less revealed in His past than in His present will,” was the remark. “None of us can ascribe a limit to the punishment which He visits us with in our sojourn here, nor the form His inflictions will assume.”

“But He has been merciful,” said the old man, faintly. “My boy returns; our name is saved from disgrace; that sweet soul assured me so”——

“Yes, but at what price? Does not her present state afford a key to the manner of her brother’s redemption from a life of bondage? Must I tell you that that dark-hearted man, who has been his bane and yours for many years, sets him free on the condition that *he* should wed your daughter? Your son has advocated Wilton’s cause. He has trafficked on her love for you. And in her desire to save you both from shame and dishonour, she



has this day given her assent to the loathful contract."

Colonel Neville gazed on the speaker as if he only partially understood him.

"What are these words, Powell," he said, huskily. "Repeat them; I do not comprehend you."

Dr Powell did so.

"Oh, that I had died before I had seen this day!" cried the old man, in bitter anguish. "*He* told me this should come to pass: *he* would bide *his* time; but *he* would triumph in the end. And is Ellen's sad state the consequence of this pledge?"

"I have every reason to believe so. In fact, her wild words to-night too plainly assure me of the source whence this calamity has come upon her."

"Oh, in what does that man's authority consist?"

"In a secret, that if revealed would place your son within the grasp of the law."

"It is terrible! oh, it is a terrible alternative, Powell!" cried Colonel Neville, with bitter emphasis. "For years I toiled to raise my name in honour before my fellows. Shall it, now I am hastening to the grave, loom over me, blackened and defaced, the gibe and scorn of man?"

"What!" remarked Dr Powell, gravely;

“would you, for the world’s opinion,—such vain consideration at a time like this,—heap misery on the head of her whose life has been devoted to your comfort with such angelic patience? Do you think it possible, even viewing this sad affair in a narrower light, that you can ward off evil by adding injustice and cruelty to guilt?”

“Man! man!” cried Colonel Neville, with something of his old pride and spirit,—“you know not a father’s heart. I would save my son, my guilty boy, from shame; but if I lose *her*, I am indeed bereaved of the light of mine own honour. I will go to them; I will resign Mowbray into their hands. The few days, the few weeks, that I have to live, shall be spent in some secluded spot beyond the world’s ken; there I will be happy, so that I know I can pillow my weary head on that dear child’s bosom, and breathe out my last sigh. Not a moment shall be lost. I have strength now, Powell, let us seek them out at once”—and he was rising from his seat, but his companion restrained him.

“You know not with whom you have to deal,” said Dr Powell, still speaking very gravely. “I must again revert to our conversation the other night. You remember I told you then who had



come into this neighbourhood ;—who that female was who had spoken words of scorn and bitterness to you ;—that revenge upon you had swayed her passions, till it had shaped itself into a destiny. She has a son ; he it is who has been a cloud on your hopes, and over your house, from the hour that your roof sheltered him. In Wilton, your remorseless foe, you must learn to recognise the son of Madalena Barrilli.”

“ Great God ! can this be true ? ” cried Colonel Neville, horror-struck and aghast. “ Powell !—Powell ! ” he continued, after a short reflection,—“ It cannot be ! That evil-hearted man was the illegitimate son of the Lady Adelaide’s brother, the Lord D’Argentin, by some professional singer he met in Paris, and who accompanied him to the east.”

“ And that professional singer was Madalena Barrilli ; she was the lawful wife of the Lady Adelaide’s brother, the Lord D’Argentin, I truly believe. There was no child born to them : this boy, of whom we spoke, was, at the marriage of the Lord D’Argentin, adopted by him ; and he was withheld from his rights through the Lady Adelaide’s resistance of the mother’s claim upon her kindred. But


the boy was illegitimate. Colonel Neville, he was born some considerable period prior to the connexion, whether lawful or not, that existed between Madalena Barrilli and your brother-in-law." So spoke Dr Powell, and he uttered every word with marked emphasis.

"In God's name, what horror do you insinuate? Have mercy on me, or you will drive me mad!—Powell, what *do* you mean?"—and the old man clutched his companion's arm with frantic violence.

"Calm yourself, my poor friend," was the remark,—“there is something I have not yet been able to clear up. I have, however, said enough to show you that affairs are in too perplexed a state at present to admit of your interference.”

But Colonel Neville heard not what was said. His head was bowed to his breast; and if reason retained its seat, his position was now even more pitiable than hers over whose suffering he had that night wept.

As Dr Powell stood on the steps which led to the entrance-hall, his attention was attracted by the sound of a horse at full gallop on the park avenue. A moment's listening confirmed the fact, and he stood out from the house to meet the messenger, for



he concluded some one of his clients required his presence, and had sent to Mowbray for him. But not so. No common energy influenced that reckless pace. The rider dashed on, threw the animal he bestrode upon his haunches, then bounded from the saddle, and sprang towards the door. The courier was a tall man, in military undress, without overcoat or wrapper. Dr Powell hastened forward, and by the light of the hall lamp, he recognised the haggard and yet excited face of William Neville. A nervous hand was placed on Dr Powell's shoulder, and a voice, hoarse from agitation, said,—“ I have ridden hard to find you. Tell me, for Heaven's sake, is Ellen's illness dangerous ? ”

Dr Powell was no doubt touched by the tones of sincerity with which these words were expressed, for he answered with grave kindness, “ I assure you, illness is not a fitting word ; her case is most alarming. Fever rages ;—delirium has ensued ;—the only chance of preserving her intellect from utter overthrow, rests on the authority from you, to break to her, when delirium abates, that the curse does not await her. If I cannot do this, I expect a relapse, for her frame is so enfeebled, that she has

not strength to make head against nerves so tortured. It is an awful consideration, Mr Neville, and I have spoken solemn truth."

William Neville leant against the railing by which he stood, evidently acutely touched. Had he, in his cruel selfishness, dragged his sister to the gates of death? His conscience accused him. Dr Powell's words confirmed the accusation. A sort of passionate anguish burst from the lips of the strong man; he could not speak.

Though Dr Powell was severe to villany, and abhorred a systematic scoundrel, he was lenient to the man who evinced contrition for his misdeeds. Nature was alive within Neville's heart; its lamp was suddenly lighted. He would once more plead for Ellen, and with his hand upon his companion's arm, he said with much feeling,—“ Does the sight of the old house recall thoughts of the past, Mr Neville—the happy past—when, without care or weariness, you sported with your young friends in the walks around? If so, bend your heart still to those memories, and you will find a virtue in them, which will, even at this late hour, gain a victory for you over the evils of a bad, worldly education. Think of your sister then—the sportive angel that she

was—how lovingly she would count on you as her protector, looking up to you as necessary to her security, if she was tempted to stray far from the old grove yonder. You must remember that sweet guileless confidence which caused even old hearts to sun themselves in gladness. So has she been, through life to you, until this hour, the fresh, the pure, the beautiful in affection, without a stain of selfishness. She has stood by you, whilst others have forsaken you, with a strength of love almost past parallel. And now that your mind has awakened to these things, will you not still be her protector, so far as to shield her from one more wily than the serpent, and more cruel than the wolf?"

Dr Powell paused—and then Neville cried,—  
“You know not what you ask ; it is indeed no light obligation that binds me to Wilton—that gives him so vast an authority over me. One hour I resolve to dare the worst—to hurl defiance at him ;—the next, and shame, dishonour, and infamy, and darker dread, strip me of the little nerve I have, leaving me more impotent than ever, and then concession to his will becomes imperative.”

Dr Powell was at a loss how to proceed. At last, it occurred to him there would be a chance of

observing the true complexion of his companion's heart, if he led him to his sister's room ; if that sad sight had no sympathetic influence, nothing he could say would avail..

Acting on this thought, he took William Neville's arm, and said,—“ Come with me ; I believe you can do so without detection ; perhaps it will be the last time you will have an opportunity to see *her* !”

Neville allowed himself to be led on ; and they gained the sick-chamber. There seemed no abatement of poor Ellen's dangerous symptoms. She was still delirious. The curtain of her bed was partially closed ; through an aperture, William Neville gazed unrecognised. Objects then met his view, enough to stagger stouter nerves than his !—That once bright being lay in her father's arms, whilst a convulsive start betrayed the nature of her affliction. Her moans were blended with her father's sobs. His fortitude had quite abandoned him. The expression of that anxious, care-worn countenance fell on the young man's heart with a shadow which darkened as he gazed.

Apart, in mute respect, wiping still silently tears away which could not be suppressed, that stranger-

lady stood—in sad, impressive attitude—William Neville's half-blinded gaze, for he felt sorrow rested on *her* ; he started back in strange dismay ; the little colour on his cheek was gone ; he looked as if he held no command over thought, as if he had no confidence in his own senses. Some minutes passed, and he seemed indifferent to things around him ; but presently Ellen's voice rung upon his ear. Alas ! how sadly changed !—He trembled violently ; starting as if an adder had stung him. As the words came, “ William is innocent !—Protect him, Charles, for he is innocent ! ”

The listener could endure no more ; he reeled towards the door ; the words still followed him ; and more fearful still, his father's sobs. Nature, distorted as it was, listened to that wail in fear and wild affright. With faltering steps, he reached the hall, then leant against the door-way for support. The exercise of thought seemed gone ; his countenance betrayed his terror—his remorse.

Dr Powell was near him ; the feelings of the good physician were sensibly enlisted. “ I feel that sad scene must affect you,” he said. “ You will now second my desire ?—You will save your sister ? ”

“ Give me four-and-twenty hours for reflection

and preparation," replied William Neville, rousing himself from his abstraction, and speaking very nervously. "To-morrow, at midnight, I will be at your house at S——;" and, as if he feared to trust himself further, he sprang into the saddle and dashed recklessly down the avenue.

With a thoughtful air, Dr Powell re-entered the sick-chamber; the father's arms still supported the sufferer, and the morning light beheld her nestled on his breast.



CHAPTER V.

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It was a matter of no great surprise to Napier and his friend Langton to find that Wilton and his companion had suddenly left Paris. For some weeks, Napier had been left unmolested and untrammelled by Wilton's craft; personally, his situation was more agreeable, but his mind was even more than ever tortured and uneasy. He had tasted the bitter fruits of misplaced trust. He had lived to learn that reason, not sympathy, should influence our observation of character; but perhaps the more immediate source of Napier's dissatisfaction arose from the fact of his enemy having returned to England. "Who could tell," as he often said to his friend Langton, "what daring plot he might put in execution there, and how far he might succeed over persons who could not cope with his cunning, especially with faculties harassed

and worn down through sickness and mortification." Napier felt the most insatiable desire to bring his stern investigation of affairs, relative to his missing brother, to a speedy conclusion. A sensation of indefinable dread haunted him. He pictured to himself persecution and trouble to those he regarded with even an increase of interest, since he was made aware that a cruel fate had stripped him of his long-garnered hopes in reference to Ellen. His generous desire to protect his friends at Mowbray from Wilton's machinations, was a fiery spur now to the unravelment of a mystery which, when accomplished, would leave him free to counteract Wilton's plots. Provinces were traversed, inquiries instituted, but with no avail. That marvellous engine the secret police, at the instigation of its chief, laboured with assiduity, but it was baffled.

Napier received a short note from M. Marcel, requesting his presence at his bureau. He speedily obeyed the summons. His heart beat quick and painfully as the chief magistrate informed him that at length he was satisfied Armstrong could be secured. M. Marcel's intelligence was to the effect that Armstrong had retreated

from Paris, on Napier's arrival, under an assumed name,—that he had been in London for two months the past winter, and had embarked for Lisbon under his old name, De Morney, shortly after Napier and Wilton had met at Mowbray. From Lisbon the man in question had moved on to Gibraltar, and thence to Palermo. In the latter city he had provoked a quarrel with a Sicilian nobleman at a gaming-table, which had terminated fatally to his opponent. De Morney had been compelled to abscond from Palermo to escape the vengeance of the nobleman's family ; and after a short period, he had made his appearance in Naples in company of one Signor Ganzola, a noted brigand. Two or three times De Morney had absented himself from Naples, but had returned. Naples was evidently his head-quarters, as he was prosecuting some political intrigue as agent of Ganzola and his party. M. Marcel's emissary, Marôt, was at Naples,—had traced De Morney's steps, wormed himself into his secret, and now anxiously awaited further instructions.

“ Now, M. Napier,” remarked M. Marcel, “ our tedious labour promises fairly a speedy termination. Wilton has evidently laboured hard to baffle

inquiry, and this proves his connexion with affairs which interest you ; and he has done his best to get this man Armstrong out of your way—he is Wilton's tool. Men of such dissimilar education and position in society are never bound together, as Wilton and De Morney evidently are, without the connexion be essential to the safety or of advantage to the interests of the most designing of the two ; which I consider to be the master-mind, I need hardly say. Indeed, the fact of Wilton being able to dispose of De Morney or Armstrong at his pleasure, is of course sufficient testimony of his authority. This creature of Wilton's must be secured. If I judge aright, you are prepared to set all personal consideration aside to effect this object ?” Napier uttered a hasty assent.

“ Well,” pursued M. Marcel : “ under difficulties you English gentlemen evince great vigour and activity, and you have nerve and hardihood to back you too. You will then proceed as speedily as possible to Naples ; I will make known your intentions to Marôt : place yourself under his guidance, travel incognito, and may good fortune be vouchsafed you at last.”

Langton was quickly placed in possession of

this desirable information, and agreed with Napier that no time must be lost. There was only one individual whom they took to their confidence, Count Molé, for his friendship was beyond question ; besides, he was the relative of M. Marcel, and no doubt this connexion had some weight with the chief magistrate of police in labouring to trace the fate of a man who had saved the life of his favourite nephew. After some reflection, Count Molé expressed a desire to accompany Napier, a proposition to which the latter readily assented. M. Marcel then provided the party with passports, bearing feigned names.

Napier paid his last visit to the embassy ; nor could he resist the inclination to say farewell to Mademoiselle D'Aigrigny and her guest. Since the affair of the salon, in which Alphonse D'Aigrigny had so discreditably figured, from a feeling of delicacy Napier had discontinued his visits at the hotel D'Aigrigny ; but now that he was going to leave Paris, common politeness dictated a farewell call. He had received the depositions of the lady Inez relative to Wilton's persecution of her, which he had placed in Mademoiselle D'Albani's hands, without a word, the day after he had en-

trusted the same to her care. The packet was securely sealed, and directed in that lady's writing—no more; and as he had never met Mademoiselle D'Albani from that hour, he concluded that she was either indisposed or had left the capital. On entering the hotel, Napier found the brother and sister in the utmost alarm and distress; and as the elder D'Aigrigny, for to him I allude, knew nothing of the transaction in which his brother Alphonse had figured in reference to Napier, he said:—

“M. Napier, you will be grieved to learn that Alphonse has seriously involved himself in an affair with a countryman of yours, a Sir Thomas Ashtonby. It seems there had been some grounds of offence on the part of Alphonse, which were passed over at the time by Sir Thomas Ashtonby, and my brother quitted the capital for some days. He returned the day before yesterday, and your countryman used his horsewhip upon him in the public promenade. An outrage of this character naturally led to a meeting; and I have just heard that Sir Thomas Ashtonby has received a mortal wound, and that Alphonse has fled. This un-

toward event accounts for our consternation ; pray endeavour to console Pauline ; I have duties elsewhere :” and he left the apartment.

Napier’s first thoughts were of his poor wounded friend. Had he not impressed on him the necessity of avoiding Alphonse D’Aigrigny ? How could he, poor fellow, be so rash as to lay himself open to the imputation of being the aggressor in violence, and thus give a villain an opportunity of revenging his lack of success in robbing him. Napier checked his bitter reflections on his wilful friend’s conduct, for Mademoiselle D’Aigrigny was before him with her head bowed low, and weeping silently. He drew near, and strove to comfort her ; her liquid eye beamed with emotion as she said in reply to his generous words :—

“ You would dispel the bitterness of my feelings at the expense of your own outraged faith. You possess a generous heart, M. Napier ; in the midst of distraction and pain you give thought to the peace of others :” and, with her eyes now fixed intently on him, she said : “ I shudder to think of the dreadful consequences which might have resulted from my brother’s treachery to you ; but for the

most noble-hearted friend that ever human being possessed, your own life would probably have been sacrificed."

"I feel it, and to you I owe....."

"Not to me, not to me!" cried Mademoiselle D'Aigrigny, misunderstanding Napier's words. "My heart is earnest in its prayers for your welfare; but to another you owe the debt of life,—to one who tore nature from her being to succour you."

"You allude to....." Napier paused; for a minute there was a mutual silence. The lady gazed steadily into her companion's face, and filled up his sentence by saying:—

"Livia D'Albani."

"I have heard as much before," said Napier with much feeling. "It is impossible to doubt the nobility of her mind; but I feared her affections were ensnared by my bitter enemy: and that mistake has wrecked the peace of her heart and conscience; and, in performing what her pure mind felt an imperative duty, she quaffed the bitterest draught with which fate's mysterious phial could be filled."

Napier at last inquired, with great earnestness, if



he might be permitted to speak to Mademoiselle D'Albani.

"What! are you unconscious," was the reply, "that she has left Paris these ten days? After the heroism she displayed on that terrible night, her spirits sank away to utter listlessness. She would not go abroad into society, nor interest herself in any of her former tastes or occupations. At last she left me. There was much trouble and anxiety in her sweet face as she bade me farewell, and her words were,—'My heart is in the happiness of another now: I go to protect it.'"

Napier seemed greatly perplexed; and then, as if fired by an impulse he could not resist, he took his companion's hand in both his own, and said very earnestly:—

"In my short sojourn in this capital, I have found that friendship which some think a marvel, if not a delusion. Your sweet guest and yourself, dear lady, have exercised its virtues with a sensibility which wraps both heart and mind in gratitude. To requite your goodness would be impossible; but, oh! remember, and pray repeat my words to her,—that if at any period of your lives truth of heart and hearty service can avail you aught, you

may turn to me as to one who would hold the duty of friend the dearest privilege of life."

Through the expression of trouble came forth a soft smile upon Mademoiselle D'Aigrigny's lip, as she answered :—

"This assurance will comfort *her* ; she needs it, I assure you. If your present pledge be ever appealed to by *her*, remember my interest in it is given up to her....."

As Napier left the Hotel D'Aigrigny, he hastened with Langton to seek out his unfortunate countryman. He found poor Ashtonby had just been borne into his hotel in a deplorable state. It was at once understood that the shadows of the grave were over him. The dews of mortal agony hung on the dying man's brow. A kind hand, with almost feminine gentleness, wiped away these tokens of anguish, and his expressive sorrow awed the loquacious company which had gathered round, to respectful silence. The eyes of the unfortunate man opened, and when he recognised the man who acted the friend's part in this sad hour of need, he feebly stretched forth his hand, and said :—

"Langton ; dear, noble-hearted fellow, I thank you."

An acute convulsion checked further speech then, and when the pang passed, he added, but the voice was husky now :—

“Napier ! Langton, where is he ?”

Napier drew nearer still, but he could not speak ; his warm heart was acutely touched. The sufferer took his hand, and, with affecting sensibility, said :—

“My mother, Napier ; bear my love to her. I feel now how deep her affection was. Do not mention the affair of the salon. Do not rob her of her pride in her son.” He paused a time, then taking Langton’s hand in his, he further said : “You have forgiven me. I did you injury ; but you will be happy. God bless you *both*. Tell *her* I said so. ....Napier, a long farewell ! This morning I made plans ; but this is vain.....it is a fearful moment, .....death comes,.....a moment longer.” There was another pause. The sufferer’s head sank back upon the pillow : once only his eyes partly opened, and his lips faintly articulated : “Pray for me ;” then one stifling sob, followed by a dire convulsion, and all was blank to him. The strong man, over whose bright spring of life the sun of existence beamed a few hours before in sportive gaiety, was

now no more. The step so vigorous,—that pride of graceful manhood so great,—the tongue which uttered the proud thought,—all stilled, all sentenced to eternal silence.

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Napier with his friends reached Naples. Napier had been advised to live in as secluded a manner as possible; and, to effect this object, he procured a furnished house in the suburbs of the city. His first thought of course was for the emissary of M. Marcel, the vigilant Marôt, whose penetration had, it appeared, at last worked with good effect in Napier's cause. But before Napier could refer to the address given him, he received a note, signed "Lefèvre," saying the writer would have the honour of waiting upon Monsieur, and on no account should be identified as one whom Monsieur might have ever seen before; and shortly after, as Napier's valet (the man Napier had engaged on Alphonse D'Aigrigny's recommendation) intimated to his master that a person of the name of Lefèvre was anxious to see him, trusting to be engaged as a *Laquais de Place*, Napier desired the man to be admitted to his room; and soon afterward he saw a person before him, whom, to the best of his recollection, he had

never seen before. When Napier's valet had withdrawn, Count Molé, who was present, turned to Langton, and, pointing to Napier's grave face, smiled, then touching the candidate for the situation of *laquais* on the shoulder, he said :—

“Admirable, Marôt! your own mother would not know you; but for M. Marcel's hint, I should have been as much in the dark about you as my friend Napier. But the moustache, Marôt; how have you managed to get it to such perfection in a month?—and the dress,—the careless, swaggering air,—why, man, you are three inches taller than when I last saw you! You are two stone heavier; and, on my honour, there is an expression in your face of fun and devilry, although in Paris there was no appearance of these traits of character about you.”

“Monsieur is disposed to flatter,” answered Marôt; “but Monsieur must remember that it is of vital importance to M. Napier that Marôt, the police agent, must not exist in Naples beyond this room and present company. I must be on my guard with Duport (Napier's valet); but I think since M. Napier failed to recognise me, I can escape his vigilance; however I must be retained in your ser-

vice. Monsieur le Count, will you pardon my asking you to take guard over the door ; Duport might otherwise use his ears, which, of all things, must be avoided in regard to my communications." And when the Count Molé was at his post, Marôt said : " Had you arrived a week earlier, Monsieur, matters could have been far more easily arranged. I am satisfied about the man you seek. I have been more than once in his company, but he has now retired with my esteemed acquaintance, Signor Ganzola. He must be expert, for, if some of my friends here knew as much as I do of his projects, the hangman would deprive you of your man. I know Ganzola's retreat ; he lies in the neighbourhood of Pompeii. Armstrong, or De Morney, as he styles himself, is with him."

" How may they be approached ?" asked Napier. " Are there no means by which we could surprise them, and thus cut off retreat ?"

Napier spoke resolutely ; such was his anxiety to secure Armstrong, that he would have given his right hand to be able to seize him with the other.

" It would be a rash experiment," was the answer. " By stratagem only can we successfully cope with these human foxes. You have a good

knowledge of the language, M. Napier ; would you hesitate in a step fraught with great personal danger ? ”

“ *I hesitate ! No. I tell you,* ” said Charles Napier, with a coolness which guaranteed the nerve and courage which his words evinced, “ that I am prepared to dare to the utmost extent of peril. Suggest your scheme ; I will back it with a right willing heart. ”

“ Include me in the venture, ” interposed Langton ; “ you know my resolve henceforth to go inch by inch with you. ”

Marôt smiled cheerfully as his eye met Langton's. The emissary seemed to understand at a glance that he had to act with men of noble and commanding character ; even he whose wits were so keen, and whose courage had been tried, as is Damascus steel, before he filled his present responsible post, felt influenced by Langton's stern, sagacious mind, by Napier's gallant, chivalrous bearing ; and he determined to go forward with no common zeal in the cause of men whom he felt would crown success with a noble guerdon, and be foremost, too, in the hour of danger and difficulty.

“ You speak gallantly, Messieurs, ” remarked

Marôt with much deference ; “ but, as I intimated, you will run great hazard. The men with whom we have to deal are desperate characters ; and no time must be lost. Give me twenty-four hours, and perhaps I shall strike out a plan of operations. I have received instructions and hints from M. Marcel of vast utility ; but to satisfy myself and act with security, I must take up my lodging under your roof. You, Monsieur, can engage me as your *laquais*,” he added, turning to Langton. “ I will strive to perform my duties honestly.”

“ You will then be an exception to a rule, Marôt,” said Langton ; “ but nevertheless I will accept your services with satisfaction : it will be highly gratifying to explore those curious ruins of antiquity at Pompeii under your sagacious guidance ;” and Napier added :—

“ Delay not an hour : there is more than you know of depending on your promptitude and foresight.”



CHAPTER VI.

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ALTHOUGH past midnight, lights still burnt in Dr Powell's library at S——. Dr Powell was seated at a table, with a medical review before him; but he seemed too deeply occupied with his own thoughts to give much attention to his book. More than once, the last ten minutes, he had risen from his seat, and gazed from the window. He was anxiously waiting William Neville's arrival. His greatcoat was near him; whip, gloves, and hat upon the table intimated that his professional duties called him forth, even at this late hour. In fact, his presence was required at Mowbray, and he was become quite nervous from delay.

Half an hour or more passed, and he reluctantly commenced preparations to leave his residence, when a sharp ring at the bell suspended his operations; and in a few seconds, the man so earnestly

looked for entered the apartment, with an excited air, and in loose disordered attire.

"I feared your promise had escaped your recollection, Mr Neville," Dr Powell said, glancing at his watch.

"Why not say, that you believed I had repented me of my promise?" was the reply. "The man that is doomed to the gallows scarcely forgets that he has been sentenced, I should think, when the hangman knocks the fetters from his limbs. If you must know the reason of my delay, I will tell you, that a creature of Wilton's named Miller, dogged my steps on my way hither, and even sought to confine my peregrinations within the limit of his own fancy. I tried to shake him off, but did not succeed until I left him on his back in the kennel."

"Once upon a time, this said Miller was Mr Napier's valet, was he not?"

For some reason, Neville parried the question by another.

"Tell me," he said, "is there any alteration in my sister's state?"

"Yes," answered Dr Powell, gravely; "but not

for the better—brain fever has ensued. It is a sad spectacle, Mr Neville. She exists, she breathes ; I cannot venture to assert more.”

Neville had not taken a seat ; indeed he was pacing the room in a nervous agitated manner. At last, he said :—

“ When I last saw you, you said there would be a chance of saving her if I would authorize you to assure her, on the return of consciousness, that she was released from the contract to which she had bound herself.”

“ Bound herself !” exclaimed Dr Powell, and he was tempted to say more ; but, checking himself, he remarked, “ I will not carp at words, however ill applied. What I said to you I reiterate ; and unless you come forward and protect her from the fate which hangs over her at present, I, who have noted the workings of this heartless drama, will brand you as her destroyer.”

There was a hesitation, a something in William Neville’s manner which Dr Powell did not like, and which prompted him to speak thus sternly.

Neville’s face betrayed acute uneasiness and passion.

"Spare me! spare me!" he cried, huskily; "bait me not by such harsh words,—'t were dangerous,—terror arouses evil passions, and they wait not for reason to influence them. 'T is poor triumph that such as you delight to gain over us reprobates, as you call us. Thank your God you are saved from the thoughts which wither the brain, and bind the soul in iron bonds, and be merciful."

"I seek no triumph, Mr Neville," remarked Dr Powell, calmly; "would that I could feel it in you with a friend's faith and sympathy. But let us understand one another. I profess no interest in you. My aims are *hers*, not yours. The burden of my anxiety is for *her* welfare, and not yours. But we lose time,—let me recall you to your task,—by doing a good action now, you deprive even your enemies of a right to condemn you. A past evil cannot be recalled; a present worthy act serves as a partial antidote to much mischief that might have resulted from it."

Neville stopped suddenly before the speaker; he seemed to strive to overcome his nervousness.

"Will you aid me?" he cried, with quivering lip; "and will you swear secrecy concerning what I might reveal? I have been a great villain,

though not a hardened one. There is one more guilty than I, and to him I can date my ruin."

"Nothing feeds human error more than that deplorable weakness of ascribing its existence in our own hearts to arise from the example and authority of another. Depend upon it, Mr Neville, that the evil of our own hearts is the basis of our imprudence, vices, and ruin. Others may build upon it for their own advantage, or pander to its false, unhealthy influence; still we rebel against reason in supposing that the falseness or treachery of a companion can justify or excuse our own infirmities. In the great lottery of life there are many prizes; our chances are equal, and we must abide by the ticket we draw forth by our own hand. You ask me, if I will aid you?" pursued Dr Powell; "to this I say, I know not; if I can consistently do so, I will; however, it is a safe practice for the physician to learn his patient's symptoms before he prescribes. As far as secrecy is concerned, I never betray a trust."

Neville was still irresolute. He thus argued with himself; if I reveal all, I am safe as far as this man is concerned, no doubt, and Ellen will be saved. Suppose I hold out and dare Wilton,

then, before a week has passed, he will hand me over to justice ; and, struggle as I might, I shall be condemned, as he holds Armstrong a sure witness against me, who would not hesitate to twist into a lie the only vestige of truth with which my case is furnished. He came at last to a decision, and seating himself, said :—

“ Dr Powell, you shall know all ; I will rely upon you.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Dr Powell listened attentively to the terrible tale, evincing much emotion as his fears relative to Henry Napier's fate were confirmed. After some reflection, when Neville had completed his disclosures, he said very earnestly,—“ Tell me, then, what course you intend to pursue ?”

“ Ellen shall be saved—a tardy act of justice !” was the answer. “ Go to her, tell her, when you have an opportunity, I have released her from Wilton's authority. This very night, I leave England for ever. A week hence, you will acquaint me with her state.” He wrote a line on a card, handed it to Dr Powell, saying, “ Here is my address.”

Dr Powell gravely tendered it back, and said,—“ This I cannot, will not, receive, Mr Neville.

Should the worst ensue, the public papers will announce the calamity. If your sister survive a month hence, all danger will, most probably, have passed. Had I not pledged myself to observe secrecy, I should not permit your leaving this room. In conniving at your escape, for you must bear in mind, you are flying from something even more terrible than Mr Wilton's evil authority, I am partly criminal; but go you will; my word once given shall not be recalled." The speaker paused—hesitated—then, turning to his desk, said,—“I have two letters for you. I was instructed to arrange for them to reach you in your severest need; that hour, perchance, has come, and therefore I discharge the trust imposed upon me;” and he handed the letters he alluded to to his companion. The first Neville noticed was directed in a lady's hand. He broke the seal; a crimson glow suffused his haggard countenance as a roll of bank notes met his view; no word was there to reveal the name or purpose of the donor. He was evidently affected, for he turned to the direction, and then he handed the letter back to Dr Powell:—

“Return this,” he said; “I cannot accept her bounty. Great God! is it come to this! Poor

Fanny, would you indeed succour me after your countless wrongs?" A troubled eye was turned to the other letter; his hand trembled as he opened it, for he recognised the once well-known characters: but alas! how expressive now of the feeble hand that formed them! As he opened the envelope, a cheque for £1000 was enclosed,—that, to do justice to the wayward man, he did not seem to care about; his eye was fixed on one straggling line, and a host of memories must have crowded before his sight as that one line said: "My boy, this accompanies a broken-hearted father's blessing." The note fell from his hands. He stood as if the torture of the past five years was concentrated in that moment; but feeling was at last the victor. His head sank upon his bosom, and he wept—wept as a child.

Dr Powell's generous heart was melted at the sight of such acute distress. He approached the wretched man, and said kindly:—

"Your sympathies, then, are not seared; I can comprehend the extent of your misfortune. When your mind is sufficiently calm to admit of reflection, the memory of this hour will be of service."

Neville moved away: it seemed he had not



words to reply. He had all but reached the door when he hesitated ; and then turning round, he said huskily :—

“ You have refused to comply with one request, for which I do not blame you ; but in charity let me implore you to conceal as long as possible from my poor father the necessity of my flight ; and should he speak of me, touch generously on my errors for the old man’s sake ;” and then the door closed upon him.

Dr Powell did not move for many minutes after William Neville’s departure. His first thoughts were of the man who had left him. “ Thus,” he said, in reflecting on Neville’s position, “ are young men of the fashionable school tamely led, hood-winked, by custom ; and while imaginary light flashes under the bandage which excludes the reality, they fondly believe that they behold the sun. Prosperity cannot make them useful,—ruin cannot make them wise. This poor, despairing man had everything to render him contented and happy. From a weak compliance with social error, he was led onward step by step, until the authority of habitual guilt became so great that he could not escape from it. Worse than I thought,”

he added, in reflecting on Neville's disclosure ; " Charles Napier, your labours are vain ; and you, poor scared lamb, how futile are your feverish hopes !" (he must have alluded to the Lady Inez) " indeed the blow will fall heavily on all. My heart bleeds for them, they are so charitable and kind. Now, I must arrange my plans ; but first I must see how poor Ellen fares."

Dr Powell stood at his front door, equipped for a journey, waiting the arrival of his steed. He had not taken his station many minutes before he was conscious of the rapid approach of a vehicle up the street towards his dwelling. The carriage-lamps flitted by object after object, and before Dr Powell had time to speculate, the horses were pulled short up on reaching his own door. Marvelling who could seek him in this manner, and at such an hour, he stepped quickly forward, when greatly to his amazement the carriage door flew open, and Langton sprang forth upon the flags beside him :—

" My good man, can you tell me—" Langton had got thus far when his hand was seized, and Dr Powell cried : " Good heavens, Langton, is this you !"

" Ah, how fortunate," was the rejoinder.

“Powell, I am overjoyed at meeting you,—I am on my way to Mowbray. Your messenger followed me to Naples ; I have not rested a moment. Inez, how is she? Miss Neville, is she safe? How fares it with friends at Vallis?—In with you into my carriage. Powell, do you know what it is to feel happy? Tell me all in a word, for I, too, have great news to communicate ;” and hurrying Dr Powell, who was too much amazed to expostulate, into the carriage, Langton sprang with nervous energy to his side ; and in a minute they were whirled onward on the road to Mowbray with as much despatch as four good horses were capable of making.

CHAPTER VII.

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THE police agent, Marôt (Lefebvre as he was now called), laboured earnestly in Napier's cause in Naples. He had taken up his residence under Napier's roof, and sought with minute and watchful vigilance to follow up the business which rested on his forethought and dexterity. In the exercise of his tact, he had allayed the suspicions of Napier's valet. This individual would have been discharged prior to his master's departure from Paris, had not M. Marcel hinted that it would be wise to retain him for a time in his present service. There was little doubt but that this said valet was a spy of Wilton's, introduced by Alphonse D'Aigrigny to further the interests of the man with whom we have seen him leagued.

This valet was a good specimen of his class. He was most accomplished in his calling, with a cun-

ning which would seem intuitive with worthies of his profession. Jacques Duport was a reflective, contemplative character—a sublime free-thinker, with a vastly expansive conscience. Jacques was a good deal thrown in the way of “the Laquais,” as Marôt was considered by him; and Marôt, from a license readily granted him, but which was regarded by Jacques as skilful management, so played his cards, that Jacques, contrary to his usual cautious proceedings, soon became “hand and glove” with his fellow-companion. Many choice bottles of claret and champagne disappeared to their mutual satisfaction; and such was the simplicity and candour of the Laquais, that Jacques was vastly confident in his own superiority and genius. So communicative, indeed, did the Laquais in a short time become, that Jacques hugged himself in the belief, that his new associate had placed himself quite in his power; and as fidelity was not one of Duport’s virtues, he had already cast about in his mind how he could benefit by his companion’s free admissions. In fact, there was so well-ruled an obsequiousness in Marôt’s demeanour towards Jacques, that his tactics bade fair to prove irresistible. During a convivial hour, Marôt had made an unreserved con-

fession of having been detected, in a little affair, which all but consigned him to the hulks, from not having taken the precaution to disguise himself; observing, "What a sad thing indiscretion is! *I* shall never do anything for myself. Ideas which would yield crowns, if they would but come at the right time, are all after-thoughts. They rise up before me when a mistake has been committed. Now, had I the sagacity of one I know and envy, 'looking significantly at his companion,' with the modicum of wit I possess, I could drive a thriving trade."

"Ah, yes," replied the self-complacent valet, "he must look ahead who struggles with an unkind world: but I cannot school you; the principles which guide me are beyond the bounds of your capacity. The very talent in which you pride yourself is against you. Wit is always fermenting; it bubbles up when it should be still, and is seldom in a becoming humour when it should be active. I like to ponder over the maxim of the sublime Rochefoucault: 'Words,' he says, 'and a smiling countenance are given to man to conceal his thoughts.' There is expressive tact for you—there is nervous eloquence and brevity. If I were not

Jacques Duport, I could wish to be Rochefoucault. I am sincere, I assure you. My fashionable philosopher ought to be vice-president of a club I preside over in Paris. Your remark," continued Jacques, sipping his claret, and then holding his glass to the light with the air and eye of a connoisseur, "instances your want of sagacity. No man should embark in a perilous adventure without disguising himself. I know some of our club, who advance the doctrine, that it is best to counterfeit their *enemies* as nearly as possible, in hopes of doing them a *good turn* ; but the idea lacks sagacity. Now, I support the principle of counterfeiting a *friend*, because if he should be marked as a suspicious character, you are free of his maudlin censure when your turn really comes. Once upon a time, having a matter of moment in hand, I assumed so nicely the prototype of my revered parent, that he was subject to a few weeks' incarceration. We hastened to prove an alibi ; but he was so angry with the authorities, that I have found his sympathy a sure card ever since."

Marôt laughed gaily. "By my faith, I give you thanks," he cried ; my heart is gladdened by your hint. I feel my fortune already made."

Jacques smiled and passed the bottle. Had he guessed the bent of Marôt's remark, he would have felt less easy. Marôt had a deep purpose in winning a confession of this character from his companion. The previous night, he had traced Jacques Duport to a certain house at a late hour, and watched for his forthcoming. He passed several hours on a bootless guard: the only person who had appeared was one dressed as a dashing brigand wearing a mask; and this individual, Marôt had supposed to be Senor Ganzola. On his return, much to his surprise, he found Jacques comfortably in bed, prepared to read his friend a lecture on his dissolute habits and indifferent tastes. Marôt was foiled, dissatisfied. But now, from Duport's admission, a new light broke in upon him, as he concluded, that for once Jacques had expressed views which he had acted up to, namely, "that no man should embark in a perilous enterprise without disguising himself."

Marôt, knowing more of Jacques Duport than that worthy imagined, was aware that he had embarked in a very perilous enterprise; and he had found that he could leave his bed and grope away very stealthily, and return in the same guarded



manner; and as such conduct argued mystery or secret service, Marôt concluded, from the other's confession about disguises, that the man who issued forth from the house to which he had traced Duport, was none other than Monsieur Jacques Duport himself. Reflection satisfied Marôt of the reasonableness of his conclusions; but he would not breathe a word to any, although he was aware that Napier was restless and dissatisfied.

"In a day or so, Monsieur," he said to Napier to pacify him, "I shall be able to give you some good news, or I am much mistaken."


The following evening, Marôt commissioned Duport to obtain his master's sanction for him to visit some friends a short distance from the city, intimating that he might not return until a late hour. The request was granted; upon which Marôt disappeared, and, after disguising himself, kept a sharp look out in the immediate neighbourhood of Napier's residence.

About midnight Jacques stole cautiously forth, and wended his way to the same house Marôt had before traced him to. Nearly half an hour elapsed, and Marôt was beginning to fear that his suspicions were still at fault, when a decrepit, gaunt female,

in seeming, came forth, and limped away in a contrary direction to that taken by the brigand a few nights previous. Marôt hesitated, doubting if the figure could be the veritable Duport; still he resolved on following for a distance, casting glances back as if reluctant to leave his watch, and yet lingeringly going forward, fearful of being again deceived.

It was a night of rain and cold: the form which Marôt kept in view seemed in haste (dropping the limp), yet uncertain of the locality. This cheered Marôt, and presently his confidence in himself was restored, as he saw that a tall figure had joined the female, and that they moved off in a direction out of the tract the first individual had followed. Marôt now resolved to draw closer to the party he dogged so sagaciously,—(an act he could easily accomplish without much danger of detection, as he had provided himself with list slippers); and he got near enough to hear the voice of the person he had followed from the first.

“Clever scoundrel! he had nigh outwitted me,” Marôt said, as he drew back into the shade, and kept a keen eye upon the movements of the couple before him.



A row of trees promised seclusion, to which the pair hastened. Marôt entered the grove some twenty yards below them, then sinking on his hands and knees, crawled through the wet grass with the stealth of a tiger, undaunted by the imminent danger he ran from his lack of knowledge of the exact locality of the individuals whom he sought. As Marôt reflected, he was convinced the pair he tracked would be content to be removed from chance observation without entering far into the grove; he therefore crossed their supposed line, and followed the footsteps which he detected with his hands. He had not been long engaged in this delicate labour before the crack of a bough attracted his attention, and he then heard the sound of voices a few paces in advance of him. He approached to within double his own length; then, coming in contact with a tree, he paused at its base, drew himself round it, and was crouched almost within arm's length of the party he sought, and could distinctly hear what passed.

"To be hunted thus," Marôt heard a strange voice savagely remark, "is beyond endurance. So he will not rest until he has captured me. He talks thus does he? We shall see. We must cir-

cumvent his plans. I will not be driven from this place just yet. I have matter in hand ; besides, I might as well make a stand here as elsewhere. He or I must fall. The cards are in my hands : I were a fool to throw my chance away."

"As you will, Monsieur," was the reply, "so that I get my reward ; but you know the instructions I had the honour to bear you, supposing, Monsieur, my dear master wormed you out ;—you were to return direct to England, and put yourself in communication with a gentleman it is unsafe to anger."

"Bah ! I tell you the cards are in my hand. I don't care a fig for Wilton ! my knife is as sharp as his,—let him look to himself. I will be his tool no longer,—he shall be mine ! I will strike at this Napier, for I have personal hate of him, and will strike at once."

"But how to do it," said Jacques Duport. "He is a daring, resolute man ; and he is backed by another (say nothing of our dear Count Molé) who would be a match for both of us, Monsieur, or I am much mistaken. His skill at all weapons is perfect. No man could match him in Paris ; and with the pistol I believe he could hit a swallow on the wing !

And faith, Monsieur, he looks at me sometimes as if he meant to put a ball through me !”

“Fool ! I am not going to storm the house and make them prisoners : things must be done quietly. Mix a powder, which I will give you to-morrow, in Napier’s wine, and he will never see another sun.”

“No, Monsieur,” answered the sagacious Jacques, “sharp eyes are upon me ; chemists are scientific. I should have that devil upon my back, that friend of his, who would hunt me to the death. Why, the night after the failure of that scheme in Paris, which I told you about a night or two ago, he bade me follow him to Alphonse D’Aigrigny’s, very calmly loading a brace of pistols before my eyes, as he did so. And having gained admittance to Monsieur Alphonse, he requests me to sit down and write what he meant to persuade Monsieur Alphonse to confess to him. A terrible outburst was the result : Alphonse was mad with fury, and swore he would stab him, and all sorts of nonsense, and looked to me to help him ; but I knew what Langton had in his pocket, and did not care to interfere ; and so he demanded “satisfaction” at the very instant,—to which this man Langton very

quietly assented, if Alphonse would produce a couple of swords, and promise, if he was vanquished, to do his bidding. The swords were produced; the pledge given; and to it they went. But in a minute away flew Alphonse's weapon, and he was requested to fulfil his promise; but Alphonse thought better of it, and still in a great fury, rashly flew at his opponent. Down he went like a shot,—I fancy I can hear the blow now; and all this friend of Napier's said, as he requested me to precede him from the house:—"You can tell Monsieur Alphonse D'Aigrigny that he has met with his deserts for his treachery to Mr Napier." So blame me not, Monsieur," continued Duport, "if I refuse to put myself under the paw of this lion. You know what I promised the other night: I will, if you are determined on your rash scheme, make your entrance safe,—*secure* the pistols as I have done before, and be upon the watch to give you timely notice if any thing occurs to frustrate your plan. More than this I cannot do."

"Be it so," was the answer, "expect me to-morrow night at midnight, remember,—I will make quick work of it. As you hinted, I can enter by the dressing-room: Ganzola will accompany me,

so will the man you spoke about just now ; and we can have one or two of Ganzola's men about the house, in case things go wrong. So remember, Duport, remember ; fail us not, and your reward is certain ; betray us, and the cold steel shall reach you, even should you seek shelter at the altar."

" I will not fail you," was the answer : " at midnight to-morrow, by the side entrance ;" and the pair drew out into the road. Marôt had heard enough, and he returned quickly, in a contrary direction, to his quarters. As he surmised, he was before Duport, who would be delayed, he concluded, in changing his dress ; therefore, when the latter opened Marôt's bed-room door, and saw him, as he thought, in a sound slumber, he smiled with satisfaction ; no doubt, thinking matters would go as he wished, because the arrangements for the villanous plot had been so well planned.

On the following morning, Marôt revealed to Langton the substance of the previous night's adventure, and suggested that he should take counsel with his friends, and inform him of the result as soon as possible. The case was a desperate one,—requiring coolness and judgment,—as, without doubt, Duport would keep a jealous watch over

their movements. If they could avoid creating suspicion, Monsieur Jacques and his friends would be the dupes of their own artifice.

To avoid a chance of being overheard, Langton proposed to Napier and Count Molé, immediately after breakfast, that they should accompany him on a stroll, and the nature of the plot was safely broken to them.

"This looks like business, certainly," cried Napier, breathing more freely than he had done for many a day. "Would that midnight were come; I would give ten years of my life to be sure of success. I fear something will occur to snatch Armstrong from me, even now."

"Fear not, fear not, my friend," answered Langton; "so that we dupe Duport, all will go as we wish; but something must be done to protect you; three to one, in so desperate a venture, are heavy odds. I know, Napier, that you are resolved to capture Armstrong yourself; but you will have enough to do; for, from all I hear, he is a strong man, and, fighting for liberty, will be a desperate antagonist. You and I, Molé, must accommodate the rest of the gang."

"Agreed!" cried Count Molé, with fervour;



"I breathe again. I pant for action. Now, my dear Napier, your desire will be fulfilled,—those ruffians will meet with a reception they little dream of. But had we not better secure Duport at once, and arrange that Marôt, that prince of agents, shall admit these men?"

"No, no," answered Napier, who had been coolly considering the course to pursue. "Matters must go as they have planned, or we lose a chance we may not get again. I can deceive Duport. You must pass your evening at the opera, and return an hour or so before midnight. Marôt shall be with Duport. When you get home, go to your rooms as usual. I will take care there shall be free entrance to my apartment after Jacques has performed his duties. I will then look to my pistols, although I would not turn one upon Armstrong for the world. Remember this, he must be taken alive. As to the others, I make no reservations."

Langton had likewise made up his mind, but he concealed his intentions, and now merely said:—

"I will confer with Marôt, though your plan is well conceived."

In the course of the morning, Langton had an opportunity of speaking with Marôt. As the latter

heard him out, he remarked, with a shake of the head :—

“ It is too great a hazard ;” Mr Napier’s life might be sacrificed before assistance could reach him.”

“ I perceive it,” said Mr Langton, gravely ; “ but don’t fear, Marôt ; I have checkmated men who have played quite as deep a game as these ruffians have in hand.”

Napier was alone in his room ; he paced it with nervous stride. He evidently realized the nature of his position. Possessing unquestionable physical courage, he had no personal fears of the encounter that was likely to ensue ; but his eye turned on its termination,—its result. The dark and painful secret which had long filled his mind with dismay and anguish seemed near a revelation. Still, if he failed now, worse than the past troubles would be repeated. If he did not succeed in the capture of Armstrong, and ill happened to himself, the suffering members of his family would be placed in a more distressing situation than ever. The door of Napier’s apartment opened, and Langton entered ; he was troubled in mind ; that was evident, and in

no slight degree. There was something in his manner akin to that which he sometimes displayed during his short sojourn at Vallis House: he seemed anxious to speak, but hesitated; and as he paced Napier's room in silence, the latter said:—

“Langton, what is it? Has aught unforeseen occurred?”

Napier's voice seemed to recal Mr Langton to himself; he looked up into his friend's face, and said, with much feeling:—

“At a time like this, I hardly like to burden your mind with intelligence which will give you additional uneasiness; still it is necessary to do so. Matters are going ill at Mowbray, Napier. That evil-hearted Wilton is about that sorrow-ridden house. He has compelled William Neville to advance his old daring scheme; and the evil has been mooted to *her*.” — Langton seemed to fear to mention Ellen's name.—“She has consented to the sacrifice!” — He paused, and turned his head away; he could not endure the sight of the torture which his words occasioned to the man he esteemed so highly.....

Charles Napier's first words were—and he spoke as if the worst scourge adversity could inflict had

fallen on his heart,—“ How did you receive this intelligence, Langton ?”

“ A friend has joined us this very day from Paris. At Dr Powell’s request, he left Vallis to communicate this sad intelligence to us, and to take counsel with us how he was to act. Powell pledges himself to delay matters at Mowbray until he can have our opinion.”

“ Ha !” cried Napier somewhat relieved, “ then all is not lost. Who knows what to-night may bring forth ? Who has arrived did you say ? Who has undertaken so arduous a mission ?”

“ Mr Pearson,” answered Mr Langton : “ he expected to find us in Paris ; but, being disappointed therein, he applied to M. Marcel, and hastened to this city without a moment’s delay ; and from his haggard appearance, he cannot have known rest for many days.”

Napier’s brow flushed as he heard the name of the new comer. *Again* at the hour of danger !—*Again* by his side !—And now, this very night, might not *his* interest, too, in Armstrong’s capture be explained ?

Napier’s mind seemed almost dazzled by this unexpected arrival ; it was some minutes before he spoke.....

“Where is he, Langton? I must see him!—Do you know a certain dread—a fear—comes over me when I think of that man; his unobtrusive friendship—his zeal in my service—his manly conduct in the hour of danger.

“I doubt the propriety of your seeing him, because the slightest movement of an unusual character will excite Duport’s suspicion,” remarked Langton. “I have told Mr Pearson how we are situated; and when he learnt how near we stood to the accomplishment of our purpose, his very breath was suspended.....His first words were,—‘I would not have been absent from Charles Napier at this hour!—He holds Armstrong in his grasp;—but what am I saying?—Tell your friend, Mr Langton, that I must have a part assigned me in this night’s work; we will meet at the hour of danger.’ When I recommended rest, he said,—‘Rest!—Yes!—After to-night, and in happiness, or in eternal silence!—Take no heed to my words, Mr Langton; my mind, through agitation, is carried away by a wild, unruly impulse. Providence has assuredly guided my steps hither.’”

After a short silence, Langton observed,—“Duport has his sharp eyes fixed upon us. You know

how especially important it is to deceive him. You must refrain from visiting Mr Pearson. We have arranged that he shall enter by and by with Molé and myself."

"Perhaps it were best so," replied Napier; "but does he bring no intelligence from Vallis?"

"He would not speak on this topic," answered Langton. "After the words which seemed to come without his having the power to control them, he grew singularly taciturn. When I questioned him about our friends, he only said,—‘To-night! to-night!—Would the hour were come!’"

Napier put no further questions to his friend. He felt it was useless to burden his mind at such a time with strange impressions. It was vain to attempt to pierce to Pearson's secret thoughts. He had been several times of incredible benefit to him. Not one discordant feeling mixed with the sum of his own deep gratitude, and Napier's soul echoed the words, "To-night! to-night!—Would the hour were come!"

For some time, both Langton and Napier were silent. The former evidently wished to speak; but he hesitated, and leant against the window-sill in an agitated, unquiet mood. At last, he turned to

his companion, and said with emotion,—“ My friend, I, too, have to claim your forbearance, for your faith and confidence in me a stranger. I owe you more than I can express. I feel that I have been unjust to you. You have given up your trust in me without reservation. I have withheld mine. And Napier, as matters stand between us, I merit censure. Still I feel I have done right. It is your generosity and nobleness of character which disarm me. As we may each of us be standing on the threshold of another world, our positions warrant sincerity. If I fall in the coming struggle, my spirit would have an unquiet rest, if you did not know your friend, and understand his heart. For reasons which I cannot even now explain, I am not able to make my meaning clear ; but take this parcel ; I intrust it to you ; if ill befall me, read it, and you will understand me. If we come out of danger without accident, I will reclaim my deposit. We shall then have leisure to discuss subjects which are mutually interesting and affecting to us. Now, after I have said this, will you still extend your forbearance towards me ?”

A flush of sensibility and feeling overspread Napier's pale, grave face, as he answered,—“ I am

conscious, Langton, that I have been a long time groping in mysteries. One hour has undone what I knew, and created fresh fancies to be overthrown. Need I say, Langton, that, from the time we met at Oxford, I *felt* you were my friend. My mind bent to an authority which was not less voluntary than mysterious. Without asking myself why, I have always felt confidence in you; and without explaining wherefore, I could trust you with the charge of the dearest interests of my life?—I will, then, readily comply with your wishes relative to your deposit. But, Langton, should misfortune overtake me, I shall leave those behind who will need a friend. Will you cheer me by the promise that you will still extend your generous regard towards them? There is one poor afflicted relative at Vallis who needs consolation; and others, if I am taken from them, who will be left not less destitute.”

“Say no more, dear friend,” cried Langton with emotion,—“I understand you well! Would that others were like you, and possessed your vivid temperament. Trust still in me; my life shall be devoted to the interests of your relatives. You know



it, Napier? Napier, have *you* not dived to *one* secret of my heart?"

"I have had my suspicions, Langton," answered Napier, with a smile, and it seemed he was not astonished at his friend's words; "but as I did not mean to express my gratitude to you for many noble acts, until your self-imposed duty was accomplished, I thought to make a requital some day, which even you would acknowledge a sufficient reward."

Langton understood Napier: the words he had heard were evidently a high source of comfort to him.

"You give me heart and confidence," he exclaimed, grasping Napier's hand, "to overcome a thousand enemies. On my soul, I have long felt ours to be a mutual cause." He suddenly checked himself, observing, in a confused manner,—“I must leave you, and strive to collect my faculties; emotion leads my tongue astray;”—and he left the room.

Suddenly Napier heard a light step near him; he turned, and his eye met the sinister countenance of Jacques Duport. "Did Monsieur feel unwell?"

—Had Monsieur called him?—He thought he had heard Monsieur's voice?"—were the ready questions put to his master by the accomplished valet.

"No!" answered Napier, so sharply, and so severely, that Jacques retreated two or three steps back.—"And how often must I tell you that I dislike your covert way of entering my apartment."

This slight incident recalled Napier to his work. The day was fast waning. Duty spake to him; the voice was not unheeded. He left his room; and, in the course of an hour, settled plans for the coming struggle.

At ten o'clock, Napier retired to his room, as if for the night. Jacques was in attendance. Seldom had he been more exact and obsequious over his duties. Napier allowed the accomplished Jacques to have his own way, whereat the latter expressed himself much flattered; and, entering the dressing-room (to which there was likewise an entrance from a room anterior to it, communicating with a back-staircase), carefully made his arrangements for his master's morning toilet; and then descended to his companion Marôt, who was waiting to commence a game of cards, as well as a choice bottle of champagne which stood beside them.

The play had scarcely begun when a ringing of the door-bell announced (as it was supposed by Jacques) the return of Langton and the Count Molé. Marôt knew that a stranger would accompany these two gentlemen, and as he acted the part of valet to Langton, he resigned his cards with seeming reluctance, and promising to return quickly to his companion, he hastened to admit them.

Langton, when the door opened, was the first to speak,—“ Is Jacques safe ? ”

“ I believe so, Monsieur ; but you cannot be too expeditious. I have left a lamp burning on the slab yonder. You know the way ; the hall door is closed ; if you can gain Mr Napier’s dressing-room in safety.”

“ But this gentleman insists on accompanying me,” interrupted Langton, directing Marôt’s attention to the person who was expected with him, and the Count Molé. “ Guide *him* safely to the dressing-room at once ; we will wait here to intercept Jacques should he come forth. Then I wish to go to my own room for a minute ; after which I can easily reach my place of ambush.”

Marôt signed to Mr Pearson to follow him ; and,

in his Vallis costume, he glided away with a stealthy step.

In a few minutes, Marôt returned, intimating that his charge was safe. Then Langton hastened to his own room. Having plucked off his boots, and unlocked his pistol-case, he loaded a pair with powder he had brought with him.

“A wise precaution,” whispered Marôt; “I suppose Monsieur is skilled in the use of those articles,” pointing to the weapons, as Langton balanced them a moment in the palm of his hand.

“I have often been compelled to test their merits, Marôt,” answered Langton, with a confident smile, “and never felt them settle more steadily to my hand than they do now.”

“I can perceive it, Monsieur, by the brightness of your eye—Monsieur has been familiar with danger; but, for Heaven’s sake, be quick; if Jacques caught sight of you in this mood, there would be a halting in the business,”

Langton made no reply, and took himself away with extreme caution to join the voluntary confederate in this night’s stern duty.

The Count Molé’s room was close by Langton’s; he saw what had passed; and as Marôt

looked in upon him for a moment, the former said, "Is all right?—Is there no possibility of our plans being frustrated?"

"I think not," was the answer. "Jacques has not left the house to-day: nor do I think he has held communication with any one except myself. Be on your guard, Monsieur!"

"Think not of me, Marôt; I am a soldier, and danger is my vocation. I hope our confederates will succeed. I trust no accident will happen to either of them—they are gallant gentlemen. I feel a strange interest in that wild-looking being who entered with us anon. Woe betide him who falls into his clutches to-night!—Do you know aught of him, Marôt?"

"I am satisfied that I have encountered him before to-day; but in what guise, or where, I am unable to say. It is almost the first time that my penetration has been so thoroughly foiled"—a slight noise below took Marôt off. He hastily entered Langton's room, bolted the door inside, then reappeared on the landing from a room which adjoined it; the door of which he locked, and took the key with him; then descended to *play his game* with Monsieur Jacques. That worthy had not, it

appeared, left his seat when Marôt entered the room in which he sat.

Jacques carelessly remarked,—“ You are free, *cher ami* ? ”

“ Yes,” was the answer ; “ farewell to the shop for to-night : and now, my fashionable philosopher, a set-to in good earnest.”

For half an hour or so, the game continued, and the champagne was gone, when Jacques, with seeming fatigue, proposed that the next deal should be the last.

It was soon got over ; then Jacques rose from his seat, yawned, and gave evidence of being quite tired out ; and then asked his companion if he was going to turn in, or out upon one of his usual rambles.

Marôt carelessly replied that he had not exactly made up his mind, and, looking from the window, and seeing that the night was dark and rainy, he observed:—

“ The weather settles it ; confound this climate ! I wonder people swear by it as they do. I shall follow your example, most exemplary Jacques, and get to bed without loss of time.”

Napier seated himself at his desk to make all ne-

cessary arrangements in case of a fatal result, and had barely completed his task when he heard a slight sound, as if some one had tried the lock of his door ; and, glancing at his watch, he found that time was bordering on midnight. Placing the letter he had written in his desk, he stepped lightly to the door, drew back the bolt, and peered stealthily around. In the distance he traced a glimmering light, which, as he surmised, proceeded from a small lamp borne by Jacques Duport on his way to admit his friends. Some minutes passed, and Napier stood concealed in the drapery of his bed in breathless anxiety. At length he heard the door of his dressing-room open. He freed his arms from all encumbrance, and stood in readiness to spring upon the intruder, whom he now supposed was approaching his bed.

Napier had taken the precaution to close the curtains of his bed, so that it was impossible to detect him until they were moved back ; and as he was ensconced in the folds of the drapery on that side at which it was most probable his visiter would appear, his position was well chosen ; and, in the absence of some untoward event, would give him a great advantage.

Napier now detected a footfall in his apartment : it drew on towards his bed ; and then a hand was laid cautiously on the curtain, which was drawn slightly aside. A step forward was then made, when a fierce basilisk glance rested on the empty couch. There was not time for it to be withdrawn before a crushing blow descended, and Napier sprang with the bound of a tiger on his foe.

The stranger was taken by surprise ; and, though so suddenly confounded, and partially stunned, the awful nature of his position inspired him with desperate courage and energy. He rallied all his powers at the instant. Victory seemed to crown Napier's bold attack, and he threw himself with wild fury on his resolute antagonist. The struggle was terrific : both were powerful men ;—one animated by as potent a desire as man ever experienced to overcome another,—the other inspired by the evil passion of revenge, and likewise well aware that liberty, if not life, was the point at issue. The stranger had gained a momentary advantage : his left hand tightened with vicious intent in Napier's cravat, and with his right he plucked a pistol from his belt. Napier seized the barrel of the weapon



and strove to wrench it from his opponent. It exploded, and an individual, who had that instant bounded into the room, received the contents in his chest, and fell headlong on the floor. A voice from the room beyond sounded shrill, yet terrible in its agony of direful apprehension :—

“ The man who fired that shot dies by my hand ! ” and, dashing an individual with whom the speaker of this threat was contending far from him on the marble flags, he bounded into Napier’s apartment,—cast an agonizing glance around, and, observing the character of affairs, he cried in the fervour of heartfelt gratitude :—

“ Thank God ! *he* is safe,” and fixing his muscular grasp on the throat of Napier’s antagonist, Pearson wrenched the latter from his hold, and held him with an iron gripe incapable of moving.

The affray had occupied less time than it has taken to recount it. Langton and the Count Molé had burst in upon the party. At a glance they perceived the result of the struggle ; and then, as Count Molé’s eye rested on the form of the individual who had fallen at the discharge of the pistol, he bent over him sternly, saying :—

“ I will ease you of your mask, my friend, that

we may see the face of him who seems to have received his death-warrant in so discreditable a business," and he plucked the pasteboard blind from the face of the prostrate man. He had no sooner done so, than he started back as if an adder had stung him.

"Mother of Heaven!" he cried, in a voice that arrested the attention of even those so terribly excited. "Alphonse D'Aigrigny! in the name of all the saints, what brought you hither?"

"Revenge!" muttered the dying man; and, raising himself upon his elbow, he drew a pistol from his breast, and was bringing it to a level with Langton's person, when the Count Molé, with a stroke of his foot, struck it from him, and, seizing his arm, held him with an air of bitter indignation and disgust. The wilful D'Aigrigny struggled to release himself. The effort was his last. The purple stream gushed from his lips, and he was a corpse.

Napier took the Count Molé's hand; but the latter seemed not to notice the act: he was contemplating the features of the dead in stern sorrow.

"Mark," he said, as if appealing to those around

him, "the retributive justice of God! An evil spirit is gone to render in a dread account. Whoever fired the shot, I bear witness to the justice of the deed."

Napier was painfully excited. Many and varied emotions agitated him. In a troubled voice he said :—

"Molé, God has judged between us. He has condemned. With the quickness of a thought I turned the pistol from my breast, at which this ruffian," pointing to the captured man, over whom Pearson stood, "presented it: it exploded in the struggle, and the ball was the death of him who requited faith and confidence by the foulest treachery!"

Pearson seemed to rouse himself at these words. He drew near the group which stood round Alphonse D'Aigrigny's body, and bent a long, strange gaze upon it. His arms were folded on his breast, his head bent low.

"A traitor!" he muttered,— "cheated of his wage, and dead through his dark iniquity!"

The Count Molé did not notice these words; but, turning to Napier, answered :—

"His presence here to-night proclaims the de-

pravity of the heart which has ceased to beat. 'Tis well his career has ended. Had I arrived a minute earlier and known him, though there are those of his name whom I love and honour, I would have arrogated to myself the right of punishment, and have slain him as he stood."

The captured man now claimed the interest of the party assembled together. Dogged and sullen was his air. He poorly conformed himself to the nature of his present position. He gazed on one, scowled on another,—a bear at bay,—still ready to rend and to destroy.

Napier was too agitated yet to commence his task. Turning to Pearson, he observed:—

"Your assistance was providential,—your presence rarely timed,—again my benefactor! How came you in my dressing-room, and what was the result of the struggle I heard?"

Pearson moved not,—spoke not: he still stood with folded arms, with his eyes bent on the captured man. By the heavings of his chest it was evident he laboured under some all-powerful emotion. Langton took up the word, by saying:—

"Mr Pearson and myself were ensconced behind a screen to mark the ingress of your importunate

visitors, and then create a diversion in your favour. Two of them passed without noticing our hiding-place, and we stepped forth and unfortunately came in contact with two others, who had just entered the room. A desperate struggle ensued for a minute; they were Italians I fancy, from their oaths and their peculiar style of warfare,—hands, teeth, and feet, acted in approved concert. When the shot was heard, I hardly know what became of them. Mr Pearson's opponent was hurled away as if struck by a battering-ram, and mine followed in suite. You know the rest. On my return to look after these worthies, I found they had decamped, but not before they had taken heavy vengeance on Jacques Duport, whom they no doubt concluded had betrayed them and their associates."

"It was so," said Marôt, who had now joined the circle. "I was in waiting to secure Jacques near the back entrance, according to our plans, and who was watching for the return of his confederates, when he joined two men who seemed in more haste to decamp than expostulate; but few words passed between them, when a blow from the butt-end of a pistol laid Jacques prostrate, and before I could interfere he was stabbed to the heart. I endeav-

oured to secure the murderer, but he broke from me, and fled with his companion."

The Count Molé at this point remarked that he had better report the night's results at the French embassy. Marôt asked if he should accompany him; the reply was, "There is no occasion for your presence, Marôt. M. Marcel has been in communication with our ambassador; besides, I saw him a few hours since; he waits my report;" and Count Molé departed on his (to him) sad errand.

Napier, having recovered his self-possession, now commenced his sad task, by turning to the captured man and saying:—

"At last you are in my power. Although I have never stood face to face with you before, you are as well known to me as if I had seen you a thousand times. Your position is a desperate one, unless you comply with my terms; for if you escape the punishment due for former crimes, this night's work is more than sufficient to convict you. Heed me, therefore, when I tell you that your only chance of safety rests on your satisfactorily revealing all you know in reference to matters about which you must be conscious I have a right to

question you." Napier paused to notice the effect of his words.

"What should I know about matters which interest you?" answered the man in French, in a savage voice; "I know nothing of your affairs, and how can I give you information? Who do you say I am? if you have never seen me before, 't is strange you should know me now."

"I know you to be one William Armstrong," replied Napier sternly; "once the ruin of his old father, the poor dupe of a man named Wilton, then a buccaneer, pirate, and smuggler,—again linked to Wilton in a capacity it were difficult to define—the jailor of the Lady Inez Napier;" (as if under the control of an ungovernable impulse, Mr Pearson here started forward, and his hand was on the supposed Armstrong, but he controlled himself with a mighty effort, and sank back in his old, stern, retiring character). Napier gazed fixedly on him for a moment, and then continued; "the frustrate assassin, the Captain De Morney, who, after a duel at Palermo, shelters himself in this capital, and who, at the instigation of Ganzola and his confederates, has acted as agent in a plot against the government, if not to compass the death

of him who sits on the throne of Naples ; and now, to prove what I have asserted, you shall be searched, for without doubt you have the credentials of your villany about you."

The man thus addressed glared with rage and fury on Napier ; but when he saw the stern eye of that wild imperious stranger fixed on him, he was cowed for a moment, and then he cried in the English tongue :—

" Suppose I am William Armstrong, and all you say, words won't convict me ; and where are your proofs of what you accuse me of ? And suppose my plea for this night's work be framed to this tune, that you, having dogged my steps for the past six months or more, and having asserted that you would never rest until you had secured my person, placed yourself in wilful array against me ; and I disliking such solicitude, having work of moment in hand, resolved, on a private interview with you, to reason with you on your imprudence and perversity, or to explain the mistake you laboured under about me ; which peaceable intention you requite by making a savage attack upon me, murdering one of my companions,—a man whom I can prove to have been your personal friend ;—what



answer can you make to this, and who can refute the plea I will set up?"

"I can at a proper tribunal," remarked Marôt, who had cast aside his disguise, and now stood in his artistic capacity of police-agent; "do you forget last night, Monsieur, your chat with a friend in a certain grove? Does not your memory retain some knowledge of your assertions there?"

"Treachery!" cried the man, grinding his teeth in the bitterness of his rage, "and I know you now," gazing savagely on Marôt. "So the political agent of the court of R—— is nothing less than a dirty police-spy. I have been a mad fool to be cajoled by you; but I will be even with you—on Jacques and you,—miserable hypocrites!" Marôt seemed in no way disconcerted: "All in the way of my profession, Monsieur," he said, calmly; "the springe must be set carefully to snare such wily birds as you; but I have you at last. As for Duport, he is beyond earthly vengeance—but he never betrayed you; he has been victimized (like many a better man) through the ill success of his employers." Seeing himself thus thoroughly hemmed in, the man turned fiercely on Napier, and said:—

“Do your worst—I defy you. Learn, however, that my name is Armstrong, and that had you not sought me, I would you some day, and to your cost. Can you expect other than defiance and hatred from me?—you who have remorselessly persecuted me the past six months, and made my name as black as the fiend’s itself,—you who deliberately compassed the ruin of one member of my family, and consigned my aged father to a jail, because he was a man, and punished your rascality? To whom does my poor imbecile mother owe her affliction, but to him who brought these horrors on her head? and you—you have done all this, and then come to me and prate about your wrongs! Finally, have you not set this spy upon my track (glaring on Marôt), to incite me to dabble in a scheme which puts my neck in jeopardy?—Ha! have I not cause for hate?”

Napier recoiled before these accusations, and Langton looked up for Pearson to refute them, but he did not; and therefore the former said:—

“Prisoner, you are either, as you hint Mr Napier thinks you, blacker than the devil himself, or a poor miserable tool, more thoroughly duped than I could have thought possible. Mr Napier may

not explain, but I will ; and I tell you that your employer, Mr Wilton, is guilty of the charges you attach to Mr Napier in reference to your family. When your friends were beggared through your ill conduct, and your old father thrown into prison (where he was consigned by a lawyer of the name of Whittaker, Mr Wilton's confidential agent), a man who stakes his honour," and here Langton looked towards Pearson, " on Mr Napier's integrity, went forward, placed your relatives in comfort, and released your father from incarceration. The individual who performed this most disinterested act of charity was relieved of further charge of his protégées through the kindness of Miss Neville and Miss Napier. These two ladies joined hearts and purses in the good cause,—removed your family to the neighbourhood of Vallis, where they now live in comfort through the liberality of a gentleman whose character you so foully asperse. Your mother's malady was occasioned by Mr Whittaker's declaration that your life had been sacrificed with the wreck of your vessel. Why this was asserted you should best know,—from whom it emanated you ought to be the best judge. One thing is certain, no man would interest him-

self about a person bearing your reputation, unless he had a strong personal motive for doing so."

"Who is this man to whom you allude as having benefited my family?" cried Armstrong; "if your words are true, I will acknowledge his claim upon me; show him to me, and you shall see that even a devil like me can be grateful on occasion—"

Pearson now spoke for the first time without raising his head. He remarked, in a deep, husky voice:—

"Would you recognise your father's handwriting, Armstrong?"

"I should," answered the man so questioned, gazing towards the speaker with wonder and interest.

Pearson drew forth a pocket-book from his breast, took a letter from it, and handed it to Armstrong. He read it, and then, in a very different manner, he said:—

"Who is this Mr Pearson? his name is familiar to me. Show him to me; lead me to him; if he corroborates your words, I will act as he wishes."

"Will you pledge yourself to this?" asked Pearson; "if he declares to you that Mr Napier has

been the patron of your family, and wholly innocent of the evil which you impute to him."

"I will," was the answer; "for if this Mr Pearson be Mr Napier's friend, and can convince me that Mr Napier has been the benefactor of my family, then I have been foully deceived."

"Then know," remarked Pearson, "that *I* am the individual to whom your old father alludes, and I stand trust for Mr Napier's conduct in the matter between us."

Armstrong evidently doubted; bereft of honesty himself, he had no faith in honour and plain dealing.

"Proofs, proofs," he cried to Pearson. "Your presence here at this moment, as well as your words, are riddles I cannot solve."

"Armstrong," observed Pearson, with grave emphasis, "we have both walked as in a dream for a long time, and we must be awakened at the same hour." He said no more. Napier and Langton consulted together, in a low voice, for a few moments, when the latter said:—

"Mr Pearson having that note in his possession, combined with the facts which I have explained, and which your father's words corroborate, should

be sufficient to satisfy you ; however, here is another written by Dr Powell : you know him without doubt."

" Ah ! what does he say ? I know him to be what you gentlemen call an honourable man."

Langton exposed a passage, in the letter to which he had alluded, to Armstrong's view ; it ran :—

" Our friend, Pearson, has generously undertaken to deliver this with his own hand, and, fully impressed with the conviction, that for some deep secret reason the interests of the Napiers are closely linked with his own well-being, I do not think I could have found a more efficient messenger." Armstrong, when he had read this, turned to Mr Pearson, and cried :—

" Then you are the man against whom Wilton has sworn fiery vengeance, who has foiled his best-laid schemes, and crossed his path on every tack that he has lately made ?"

" And I have yet an old score to settle with him, Armstrong," remarked Pearson, with deep and bitter meaning. " I have promised to be by him when the hangman claims his due. You can escape that worthy's clutches, if you embrace Mr Napier's

offer ; pardon for the past, if you faithfully divulge the secrets you possess." Armstrong hesitated ; it is no doubt difficult for a rogue to give up the evil principle which has long guided him.

Langton perceived Armstrong's indecision, and concluding that Pearson had resolved to bide his time, in his generous regard for his friend Napier's feelings, he put himself forward to present the position of affairs before Armstrong, conscious that if Napier was compelled to do so, his long harassed mind would be acutely lacerated. Langton determined to try to overcome Armstrong's fears, or rather so to work upon them, that he might be drawn into a voluntary confession.

"Armstrong," Langton said, after he had regarded him in silence for a few moments, "you cannot long cover your real sensations under the garb of coolness and disdain. You cannot : facts elicited, and things proved, render it impossible for you to play the bold and reckless part you have hitherto done. You have acted ill, but you have a chance to redeem yourself. I know it would be vain to tell you now, that you should banish the evil ideas which have long been collecting in your mind, and influencing your actions, for it takes

serious thoughts and wholesome reflection to bring a heart that *has* been evil, to look with horror and disgust on past vices and errors. You are caught in the toils of your own cunning. Cast your eye backward, and tell me if you fail to see the consequences which must accrue to you from all that you have done. Neither temper nor hardihood can render you so obtuse, so dull, so disregarding of your fate, as not to appreciate the danger of your position. For Wilton, let the curse fall, Armstrong. The bitterest earthly retribution that can fall on an evil member of society, is for him to live to realize the fact, that his plots are overthrown, and his schemes frustrated, by the same wicked means he had taken to accomplish them."

Armstrong turned to Napier, as Langton concluded his remarks, and said :—

"Mr Napier, it seems that I have been desperately deceived, and I am now conscious that my share of the evil which has been done has largely contributed to the deception which has helped to create you my bitterest enemy. My mind is made up—I will make a clean breast of it. Give me an hour to collect my thoughts, and I will tell you of things you little dream of."



Marôt approached, and as Langton whispered to him the decision to which Armstrong had arrived, he said :—

“ We must search your person, Monsieur ; fair words are sometimes used to cloak very foul designs.” But Pearson said :—

“ Pause awhile ; grant him the hour he seeks without molestation ; I will be guarantee for his safety.”

Armstrong again gazed upon the strange figure by him, and he seemed grateful, for as Napier was turning away, he thrust his hand into his breast, and drew out a parcel of letters, saying, as he took one from amongst the many he had by him, “ Give this to him, Mr Pearson ; I brought it with me to-night for a purpose I should be ashamed to own. Mr Napier should have received it a long time since.” Mr Pearson’s eye fell on the superscription. Some strange and vehement emotion agitated him as he muttered, “ This accounts for much. Ay ! I understand things better now ;” and he handed it to Napier. “ It is my brother’s writing,” said the latter, in a low, agitated voice. Langton passed his arm within that of his friend, and led him to his own room, remarking with true sympathy,—“ I know all the feelings of your good heart are engaged in this stern trial. Be firm, Na-

pier ; courage is duty still ; and remember, if I can be of service, I am within call."

Langton returned to the room in which Armstrong was. Pearson had thrown himself upon a seat. He had fallen into a dreamy fit of musing, and it was evident that his feelings were less harassing than they had been before he saw that letter, which he had himself placed in Napier's hands.

We will return to Napier. After a short pause, he summoned courage to break the seal of the letter in his hand. It was addressed to him, and from his brother Henry ; written the same day that Wilton had induced Henry Napier to accompany him and Neville to the gambling-house in London, of the result of which visit we are informed. The letter commenced with an acknowledgment of the writer's position, in reference to his cousin, Inez Curran, whom he had met in Seville, and whom he had made his wife. He expatiated on her grace and beauty ; on her pure unselfish disposition. He was evidently conscious of her deep affection for him, and he upbraided himself for a certain neglect and want of confidence of which he had been guilty towards her. Then he came to his position in regard to Wilton and Neville.

He explained that he had met William Neville on

his first arrival in Paris, and that Neville had attached himself to him with a desire to obtain his confidence. That, after a time, he considered his father's former hints, in reference to Neville's character, were too severe; and that he discovered many generous and pleasing traits in his disposition. He knew nothing of Paris. Neville and a young talented Frenchman, one Alphonse D'Aigrigny, were his guides, and thus he became connected with a man of the name of Wilton, of whom he was suspicious at first, on account of some things he had heard to his prejudice, but which feeling Wilton soon endeavoured to uproot. Then the writer touched on the manner in which he had become involved through gambling. Suddenly opening his eyes to the folly he had committed, Henry Napier told his brother he had resolved to withdraw from the society of men who had won large sums of money from him; and, following his father's instructions, he had repaired to Spain, to discover the relatives about whom his father suddenly felt so much solicitude. The singular adventure of meeting with his cousin was shortly touched upon, and the connexion which followed deterred him from explanation with his friends. Besides, after he had made Inez his wife, he feared for awhile the light in which his father

would view his conduct. He thought it would be best to take his Vallis friends by surprise, but not until he had in some way arranged a settlement of the large sum he owed to Wilton.

He had returned to Paris with his wife, intending to live secretly for a few weeks before proceeding to England, when he encountered his friends of the former season. He had unfortunately visited them, and instead of coming to an understanding about the money he owed them, he was mad enough to attempt to liquidate the amount by again commencing play. The result was, that rendered keen by ill-fortune, his suspicions of unfair dealing were excited, and he resolved to escape from their society, and leave the settlement of his debts unarranged, until he had taken the advice of some men he knew in London, who were wiser about matters of this character than himself. Intent on this object, he had withdrawn secretly with his wife from Paris, and had reached town. The day after his arrival, as he was leaving his hotel to put his resolve in execution, much to his amazement, he encountered Wilton on his way to visit him. He would not be shaken off, pressed Henry Napier to visit him at his lodgings; and when the invitation was coolly declined, hinted that

some steps should be taken to place their obligations on a proper footing. Wilton's manner had irritated Henry Napier, and instead of acting the more prudent part which he had decided on, he determined on accompanying Wilton to his rooms, and, by the exercise of his own penetration, convict the men, whom he believed to be swindlers, in their mal-practices, and thus redeem himself from his unpleasant situation. To blind Wilton as to his real views, he had given him his bond for the amount which he owed him. We know the consequences of this sad error of judgment; how resolutely Henry Napier pursued it, and how sad were the results. The letter concluded with,—

“ I am now resolved to redress, in a pecuniary sense, the great error which I have committed. I am in the hands of swindlers, that is palpably evident. I do not fear them : indeed, my position is such, that unless I can bring their villany to light, I shall be desperately involved when Vallis finds me its unworthy possessor. Therefore I am resolutely fixed in my purpose. Wilton and my false friend, Neville, wish to be quit of me ; but we do not part as I am at present situated. I would peril existence first. I have played with them often with success (for they are very wary), and I

feel certain to succeed in my object. This very night I shall propose a stake, which, if they accept, will tempt them to put their villany in practice. I can write no more,—the hour approaches,—a strange feeling creeps over my heart, and warns me that danger is at hand. I think of poor Inez, and on her account a thousandfold more than my own, lament the position into which I have so recklessly thrust myself. And, Charles, should the presentiment which at this moment weighs upon my spirits be the forerunner of evil, act a brother's part to her who deserves my deepest affection, and far different consideration to what I have lately shown her. Should you not hear from me on the third day from the date of this letter, place it before my father,—temper his anger,—and you who have ever been the unselfish and generous hearted, hasten hither, for, with a brother's privilege, with a friend's earnest faith, I consign to your gentleness and care her who will indeed need comfort and consolation."

Napier had concluded his task. Alas! what did that long silence which had intervened between the date of this letter and the present time foreshadow? He laid it down, and sat wearily and dejectedly, with his eye fixed upon it. Langton entered the room with an anxious inquiring coun-

tenance. He had naturally concluded that the intelligence thus communicated would not be comforting or soothing to Napier's mind. Without a word, Napier placed those closely written sheets in Langton's hand, and still sat as if quite overpowered, through the confusion, and harassing nature of his thoughts. Langton hastily, yet minutely, went over the letter before him. When he had finished it, he paced the room for some minutes before he broke the expressive silence. He at last drew near to Napier, and said:—

“Her suspicions were correct. Poor fellow ! it is no good now to say how madly he behaved,—the only thing to think of is how to act. We have secured the man who is able, I fully believe, to explain the dark secret. The fact of his having this letter in his possession proves that he is cognizant of much that is yet concealed from us. So come, Napier,”—and Langton took his friend by the arm,—“the hour so long sought after has arrived,—let us know all,—seek fortitude. You have nobly done a brother's duty.”

Napier moved away towards the door, but he seemed stupified ; he attempted to speak, but he could not. The thrill, the dread of bitter apprehension, was at the brother's heart ; the labour of a

year, and what the produce? The high hope, the impassioned and energetic zeal, ending in vacuity. A pure and ardent hope had been sentinel over fortitude,—it was gone? Nature was left alone, and it quivered in its weakness.

Napier and Langton entered the room in which Armstrong was confined. The dead man had been removed. The stranger Pearson and Armstrong had remained in grave silence alone together. Armstrong seemed quite an altered man. The face had lost its hardihood,—its revengeful traits; and, but that the eye was small and deep set, and the brow low and narrow, the countenance would have been prepossessing. As Napier entered the room, Pearson rose from his seat, and assumed his old guarded attitude. With folded arms, and head now resting on his chest, he stood, apparently unimpassioned. Little did those by him conceive the emotions which agitated the soul of this singular individual.

Slowly and steadily Napier approached the prisoner; and then, bending a heavy mournful gaze upon him, he said, in a low husky voice:—

“The worst, man of evil, tell me the worst;—do not by procrastination increase the burden of such cruel suspense!”



Armstrong did not give a direct answer to Napier's question, but said :—

“ I believe all that you gentlemen have told me. I am conscious now that I have been made the tool of a cunning villain ; and that by labouring to protect myself from the consequences of my own criminal conduct, I am like a man striving to extricate himself from a morass into which he has fallen, sinking deeper every moment through my own vain exertions. I will struggle no longer, but commit myself to your clemency. I can now see that my injuries at Wilton's hands are scarcely inferior, Mr Napier, to your own. I feel no repugnance in betraying him : had he found it answer his ends, he would readily have turned upon me ; that I know. Mr Napier, I have been your foe ; I was bent on your destruction to-night ; my will went hand in hand with Wilton's instructions. And why was I so bitterly incited against you ? I will tell you,—from a combination of reasons ; stimulated one hour by the false assertions of your having persecuted my friends ; and again, from a consciousness that fate had stood in the way of my rendering you a service I once meant to perform, and from not being able to do so ; and from that reason drawing your determined vigilance upon me,

I began to think there was no chance of safety for me but by compassing your destruction. Now my eyes are opened ; I see the error I have committed ; that I have by every evil wish wound a fresh toil about me. Have patience, Mr Napier ; I must touch even at length on my own history, to enable you to comprehend my connexion with events in the drama I am going to unfold to you."

Armstrong then continued, "Knowing my relatives, and conscious of all they have suffered, you are aware what my youth was (Count Molé at this moment joined his friends, having performed his painful mission), and you can surmise that the countenance and patronage of Captain Wilton had no small share in influencing the tastes and passions of a thoughtless impulsive boy, as I was when he first came across my path. He moulded me to his hands, and I now testify, with my curse upon him, that he is not blameless of my ruin. I own, 't would have been difficult to have made me steady. Well, no matter, he found me a reckless boy, and converted me, or drew me out, into a desperate and lawless character. On account of some lawless act, I absconded from home, and having a taste for a seafaring life, I volunteered on board a privateer. I had many hairbreadth escapes, and adventures too

numerous to recount. I was ever foremost in riot on shore, and in duty on board. It was a strange, wild life, well adapted to fascinate a young man of violent and ungoverned passions. Enough, I imbibed a passion for the sea. I became a true son of the ocean.

“ With the peace, our services were no longer needed. I could have entered a man-of-war, had I liked, with fair prospects of success, but the discipline was too strict; besides, I had other views. I had formed a connexion with a few fellows on board the privateer, whose tastes corresponded with my own. We had had a government license to rove in our old ship; why should we not pick up a smart craft, and make a start on our own account? Our free-will, backed by bold hearts, would prove, we thought, as good a commission as one from the Admiralty. I was the prime mover in this venture, the man of action and education amongst them who had followed me, and I was selected to carry out the plans we had conceived, or to which they had assented. On obtaining our discharge, we repaired to Havannah, purchased a smart vessel with our united means, mounted six guns, and embarked in the slave trade, a very different concern to what it has become.

“ I was captain; we made several successful voyages,

exchanged our vessel, or rather appropriated one to our use which we picked up; and with as fast a craft as ever sailed, we went occasionally, or when an opportunity offered, somewhat out of the line of trade we had at first adopted. Success rendered us bold; we became notorious; several cruisers were on the 'look out' for us, but we baffled them, and took up fresh cruising ground. We made large sums of money. We gambled on shore, and rioted to our hearts' content, returned to the ocean and replenished our exchequer. Such unusual good fortune, I knew, could not last; prudence guided me for once, and I resolved on cutting the concern. I resigned my command to my chief officer, and landed on the coast of Portugal, and repaired to Paris.

"I have touched thus, Mr Napier," pursued Armstrong, seeing Napier's impatience, "on the character of my early occupation, to account for an influence I am still able to exercise, and which nearly concerns you. When in Paris, my time passed in gambling and extravagance; even my well-filled purse soon suffered. In less than a year, property which, well-managed, would have insured me independence, was all but gone. I had kept up a communication with my successor in command

of the vessel. In fact, the agreement between us was, that I should return to my position at any time during the space of two years, if I felt disposed to do so. And at this period, when I grew short of cash, I had resolved on taking once more to the sea, when chance threw Wilton and myself together. In an hour of excitement from liquor he wormed my history out of me,—supplied me with cash,—and before I perceived his drift, I was entirely in his power, and in many instances acted the part of hireling and tool. I was then compelled to take up my residence at his hotel; living with him in the shape of dependent and confidant, though he chose to designate me his nautical friend. I cared not for names; I knew I was in his power, but he let me live the life I liked. I helped him, and he helped me. About the time I had well settled to my trade,—which was to procure the best intelligence I could about young men of property who visited Paris, their ability, connexion, and above all, the tastes they were inclined to,—your brother, Mr Napier, reached the capital. I was soon on his trail, discovered his tastes, and reported my information at head-quarters. It was arranged that William Neville should open on the line,—this duty

was done; then Wilton took up the running. Mr Henry Napier was plucked of his money. He lost more than he could pay, and resolved on leaving Paris. I knew all his movements, or noted them rather, and his designs were put into execution. The night before Mr Napier left Paris, he was mixed up in a fray in which you were meant to be roughly handled." Armstrong addressed himself to Count Molé, who stood with folded arms, intently listening.

"He saved my life," said the Count, in a low, grave voice—"who sought to take it from me?"

"Did you never hint to Alphonse D'Aigrigny, the man whose life-blood stains the floor yonder, that Wilton's good luck was attributable to something beyond the accidents of fortune, not knowing that Alphonse and him were strict confederates?"

The Count Molé answered not; he sighed deeply, and motioned to Armstrong to proceed.

"Wilton and Neville returned to England; I remained behind to receive some sums owing to the former; besides, I did not like to trust myself in the old country with Wilton. Feeling I was in his power, I strove to keep out of the way of his injuring me, if possible. My instructions were to watch for Mr Henry Napier's return to Paris. Time

passed ; the season came round ; I had heard from my successor in command of the Dreadnought ; he had driven a thriving trade in smuggling ; and to elude suspicion, as he wished to visit England, he was going to the Azores for a cargo of fruit, expecting to be in the Thames in February, when he hoped to meet me.

“Mr Henry Napier returned to Paris, accompanied by a lady, reported to be his wife, though bearing a feigned name. He had not arrived a week before I was aware of the fact. Wilton and Neville were in Paris ; I put them on the track, and they met. Matters soon went on as before ; but they were too daring. It was thought Mr Napier had grown suspicious ; and I found out that he was arranging to leave Paris. Wilton was on the alert ; he had many private reasons, he said, not to have a stir in Paris. He would follow him to England, where he should be on safe ground. I was despatched to mark Napier down when he reached London, and to report progress to my employer on his arrival, who would follow with Neville immediately on Mr Napier’s steps. I did not mind visiting England, then, because my vessel, at hand, unknown to Wilton, would enable me to slip away, if I wished, at any moment ; and I meant to do so, for my occupation had become tiresome ; and

I had a presentiment Wilton was growing tired of me, and feared the method he would adopt to dispose of my person. Mr Napier and his lady reached London, and stopped at H——'s Hotel, G—— Street. Wilton and his companion were close at their heels. I gave the former their address, and Wilton waited on the man he sought. The following night, Mr Napier presented himself at our lodgings. The old connexion seemed to be renewed; but not on the same footing, I fancy, because I overheard Neville express his fears of Mr Napier's suspecting something wrong. I was, however, too much occupied with my own affairs to note what passed; for the schooner had arrived in the river, despatched her cargo, and was now ready to sail. The master, my old shipmate, lived with me at Wilton's lodgings.

“One night,—as far as I recollect, it was in February last year,—I and my companion had just returned from the river, when I was summoned to admit a visiter. It was Mr Henry Napier; he held a letter in his hand, saying, that as the branch office in G—— Street was closed, I should forward it, by messenger, to the General Post Office for him. I promised to do so. A something, for a little while, occurred to detain me, until it was too late to per-




form my task, when I put it by for the night, thinking the morrow would do as well. After-events induced me to keep that letter in my possession. Mr Napier, it was the one I gave you just now."

Armstrong paused; but noticing the deep anxiety of more than one individual present, he said quickly, "After Mr Napier had been about half-an-hour in the house, I was summoned by Wilton to accompany the party to a private gambling-house in A—— Court, W—— Street. We went; there were three other gentlemen there. The play ran high; and Wilton and Mr Napier won a large amount. Suddenly, the place was entered by two police-officers. A desperate scuffle ensued. Neville made his escape. I had got to the bottom of the stair, and Mr Napier was by me, when we heard Wilton's shout for succour; and, looking up together, we saw him struggling with the two men who had broken in upon our amusement. Mr Napier immediately rushed back, and seizing one of the men who held Wilton by the collar, hurled him backward down the stair; and, at that moment, I perceived Wilton, with the speed of light, strike his remaining assailant in the chest, who sank instantly at his feet; and then Wilton sprang past Mr Napier, whose back at the time was turned to him,

and who could not have seen what had transpired, and called to Mr Napier to follow him. The man Mr Napier had flung backward remained senseless at the bottom of the stair. We passed on ; and, as we hurried through the street, Wilton observed, ' That poor devil you flung down the stairs is dead, Napier—a sad business for you. Here, in with you into the house, and we will see what can be done for your safety.' We had arrived at our lodgings. Mr Napier pushed hastily on ; and then Wilton, seizing hold of me, said, ' Armstrong, find your way back to the place we have left ; bring me private intelligence of the result of the fray. I fancy we can turn it to a good account.' I had seen more than Mr Napier had, and half-suspected Wilton's intentions. I did as I was desired. With a little trouble, I found out how matters had gone. The report was, that one of the officers had been stunned by a fall, but had recovered ; the other—had been stabbed to the heart."

As these last words fell from Armstrong's lips, Mr Pearson reeled, rather than walked, to a seat, and sank upon it. This seemingly cheerless, hopeless man, muttered a fervent ejaculation ; then ensued an almost mortal struggle between some deep, inexplicable emotion, and his fortitude. Lang-



ton only observed his strange condition. Napier appeared crushed and bewildered ; but before the former could make a remark, or form an opinion about Pearson's singular and expressive conduct, that strange man had once more risen on his feet ; and, as if all minor considerations had given way to a lofty burst of vigour and soul-gratitude, he stood before Armstrong, with commanding presence, and said, in a voice which caused the nigh heart-broken Napier to gaze upon him, with a face pale and aghast, as if from the cerements of the grave :—" Repeat your last assertions, word by word ; and all ye present note them well : they will cut through a damnable conspiracy ; and, by their evidence, give peace and life to a heart that has been viciously scourged."

Armstrong did as he was desired. The listeners to this emphatic speech of Pearson's knew not what to say. There was something almost fearful in the sudden, startling behaviour of this inexplicable individual ; joy more than terror fired his mien, and yet the stout nerve quailed in anguish. As Armstrong's words again fell upon his ear, he further said, " Tell us what followed :—*and then*—" He paused ; sinking back into his old attitude.

Armstrong's voice was again heard. " I re-

turned," he continued, "and found Wilton waiting for me. I reported what I had heard. He cross-questioned me closely, and saw I was aware that he had struck the fatal blow. 'Armstrong,' he observed, significantly, "we are in England. Your safety rests on my forbearance. I want your services; and demand them!—Do as I request, and you have a friend in me. Oppose my wishes, and your liberty will cease with to-morrow's light. When I call you by and by, appear to have suddenly returned from your errand, and say that the man who lay stunned at the bottom of the stairs is dead.' He disappeared.

"I was too involved myself to dare to thwart his designs. After a few minutes, I was summoned to the room wherein the gentlemen had assembled. They were leaning over a table. William Neville was amusing himself with a dice-box. Mr Napier was pacing the room in a wild agitated manner. 'Well, Armstrong,' Wilton said, 'what intelligence have you picked up?' I repeated not what I had heard, but what Wilton enjoined me to say. 'Very well,' Wilton remarked, 'you can leave us.' I did so; and closing the door in seeming, I left it on the hasp, and noticed what passed. Wilton was the first to speak. 'Napier,' he said, 'you must leave this to-morrow

before sunrise—'t is a bad business—and you may depend upon it we shall have the hue and cry upon us. You have heard what Armstrong has said.' 'Yes;' answered Mr Napier, very bitterly, "I have damned my prospects, and placed my neck in jeopardy to benefit *you!*—*you!*" 'Come! come!' remarked Wilton,—'Don't give way to ill-humour, or unnecessary display of temper. What has been done cannot be helped. The secret is in our hands, you know. You must feel confident we shall never betray you. If you have no faith in my honour, the bond, you know, is quite a security for my silence.'

"Mr Napier stopped in his walk; and I thought he was going to strike Wilton, as he stood over him. 'So much for saving you from being captured!' he said.—'Had I not followed a foolish impulse, in what position would you be now? But this is idle. Your remark about the bond rouses me to business. One more desperate venture, and, if I lose, I quit England for ever.—Your written acknowledgment, that the accident of to-night rests on your own shoulders—and my bond, which you hold against the Vallis property, when it comes to me. The terms are simple—to be decided in one throw. Do you subscribe to them?' Wilton hesitated for some time; at last he did

subscribe to them ; and, having performed his part in the contract, he took a dice-box from Mr Neville's hand. Had they seen the suspicious, glaring eye upon them which I did, they would have been aware of what I became conscious in a moment,—that Mr Napier had proposed this reckless stake, purposely to unmask their villany.

“Cool, resolute, lynx-eyed, Mr Napier stood whilst Wilton threw. Hardly had the box touched the table and a high number was seen, than Mr Napier's hand was on it. I see, even now, his wild joy, his resolute bearing, and Wilton's hellish malice. ‘I throw with this box and with these dice,’ said Mr Napier, with an air which told well what he meant. Mr Neville rose and attempted to get between them, for both had hold of the disputed box. Mr Napier must have concluded that Neville meant to aid his friend, and pushed him roughly on one side. A desperate scuffle immediately ensued. The dice rolled on the ground. Neville placed his foot on one,—Wilton quickly picked up the other. This Mr Napier saw : he stood for a moment still ; then, observing Neville's attitude, approached him, and said : ‘Remove your foot.’ Neville repulsed him, whereupon Mr Napier struck him, and called him a swindler and a blackleg. At this Neville seized Mr Napier

round the waist, and, both being very powerful men, the struggle was terrific. They had burst open the folding-doors which separated the room from a balcony which overlooked the back entrance; and here the struggle continued. At last I saw Mr Napier borne backward over the low rail at the edge of the balcony, and he fell thence on the flags beneath. I crept away, and, getting a light, hastened round into the court, with the intention of rendering the prostrate man some assistance. I had barely opened the door, when Wilton bounded from the scene of contention to the spot on which Mr Napier had fallen, and, as the latter made a feeble attempt to rise, Wilton threw him back violently. His head struck against the edge of a curb stone, and he sank, to all appearance, dead."

Napier at this point leant heavily against Langton, with his hands clasped before his eyes. His kind friend drew a chair near and placed him in it, and then sternly said to Armstrong:—

"Be speedy and conclude your tale of horror."

Armstrong continued:—

"A cry of shame escaped my lips when I witnessed the cowardly action, whereon Wilton sprang upon me, and seeing me, he held the dagger, which had before done work that night, over me, and

threatened death if I did not swear eternal secrecy. For the first time of my life, in the presence of such a deliberate murder, I felt an abject coward. My blood seemed turned to water. I had no power to resist Wilton's overwhelming resolution. He saw he had conquered me, and then his manner suddenly changed, and he said speciously: 'Mr Neville has been most unfortunate: we cannot desert him now, Armstrong,—nay, we must protect him; for 'twas done in a moment of passion. I must look to you to conceal the body.' My face, now I had recovered my nerve, showed Wilton that I was conscious who had struck the fatal blow; and he again said: 'You shall aid me: act up to my instructions, and you shall be made independent for life. I am sure Mr Neville will agree to any terms, so that we befriend him in this matter. Now, like a sensible fellow, to your task as speedily as possible.' He then gazed fixedly at me, and added: 'You know me: death or compliance.' I agreed to his views, when he turned away and sprang up the steps, and re-entered the room into which Mr Neville had retreated. I was in a terrible dilemma at first; then, after some reflection, I became conscious that even if I fulfilled Wilton's wishes, he would be at least as much in my power as I was in



his ; and forbearance towards me would be necessary to ensure his own safety.

“ Arriving at these conclusions, I approached the body, and threw the light upon the features of the prostrate man. It then struck me—for the countenance of death was familiar to me—that the worst had not ensued. I opened his waistcoat, and placed my hand upon the heart. I felt a slight pulsation. I may not be believed, but I declare my first feeling was unbounded satisfaction ; but I own that the next moment I was greatly puzzled to decide my course. I called my companion up, for he had gone to bed, sketched the affair to him, and asked him how I had better act. ‘ It is worth their while to get him out of the way, I suppose,’ were his first words. I said it must be so, or such violence would hardly have been resorted to. ‘ And he would answer *your* purpose better if he were living, perhaps,’ put my companion ; ‘ besides,’ he added, ‘ in the way of business I will assist you, but I won’t have a hand in striking at the life of a man in this state.’ I reflected a moment, and it occurred to me that I might well requite Wilton’s threats, and hold a terrible power over him, as well as Neville, if, with the aid of my companion, I could remove Mr Napier to some place of safety,

and then work upon their fears as my necessities required. Thus I should be quit of Wilton's tyrannical authority ;—more, our positions changed by my outwitting him thus.

“ I partly divulged my ideas to my friend, and promised him a share in the stakes. He readily assented to aid me, and suggested a speedy removal of the wounded man to his own vessel. But how was this to be accomplished? No difficulty long baffles a sailor's ingenuity. We had a Spanish hammock in our room below, in which we stowed our charge : then, seeing all was safe, we bore it on our shoulders through some by-streets to Westminster Bridge. Only one policeman interrupted us. We told a tale of riot and row into which a tipsy comrade had been inveigled, who had been sorely punished for his folly ; and that as our vessel sailed on the morrow, we were anxious to get him on board, and a liberal fee gave us safe passage. Promise of good pay enlisted a waterman in our service ; and in less than two hours we had safely conveyed our charge on board the schooner. The vessel was ready for sea : there was no necessity now for my sailing in her. The captain weighed the following tide, and stood for the Downs. I

heard from him from there. The wounded man had rallied, my comrade informed me, and he was on the point of sailing direct for the coast of Africa."

As Armstrong now paused, Napier gazed half unconsciously upon him. A cold sweat stood upon his brow, and the lamp which lit that room burnt low and flickering, and lent an alarm and silence to more hearts than one, from an anticipation of matter which would confirm the impression that further violence had been committed on the ill-starred man whose fate had come under so rigid an investigation.

Napier broke the silence.

"What does he intimate, Langton?" he said huskily. "Was there further crime,—was there further treachery?"—then, as if an overpowering impulse deprived him of all authority over himself, he bounded from his chair, and, seizing Armstrong by the throat, cried in a voice of terrible apprehension: "Man! man! if you would not have your blood upon my hands, tell me what has become of my poor persecuted brother!"

"He lives! he lives! at least I have every reason to believe so," faintly articulated Armstrong,

almost choking from the effect of Napier's furious clutch ; but now he was released.

Napier's tortured soul drank up those first blissful words, and *all* that they conveyed. The joy thus found flooded his brain : he dropped his hold, and, tottering for a moment, sank with a low cry senseless at his friends' feet.

Pearson knelt over him : he seemed to whisper some impassioned words ; but Napier heard them not. Langton did ; for a thrill of awe, blending with amazement, shook his frame. He turned his undivided attention to the man who had so long perplexed him.

"Great God !" he said ; but Pearson checked him.

"A few minutes longer, and I will end this poor fellow's torture," he whispered : "he is too much harassed now ; besides, there is something more to learn."

He rose from his feet at the moment Napier rallied.

"Is it real ?" the latter said. "What is it that has so suddenly changed the current of my heart's blood ? What is it that has happened, Langton ? My soul thirsts no more. Bitterness and sorrow have quitted it ! Can it be ? Have I heard, Lang-

ton, that Harry lives ? or is it a dream ? In mercy tell me !”

Langton, though scarcely less excited and self-possessed than his friend, cried with emotion :—

“ The tale is clear ; there seems no room to doubt, dear friend. You must now strive to rouse yourself to meet a glad surprise ; but we have something more to learn,” echoing unconsciously Pearson’s words.

“ Yes, yes,” answered Napier, with the docility of a child. “ I can listen, now Harry lives,” he continued. “ Hardship, trial, sorrow, and cruelty will all be swallowed up through the joy of a reunion with one who seems to have risen from the grave. Oh ! Langton, what happiness for friends at Vallis !”

There was no unconcerned listener in that room. Few could have heard Napier’s words unmoved. There was an expression breathing from them so eloquent in gratitude and affection, that the nerves of the heart were powerless to resist its influence. Even the desperate man Armstrong, the wild adventurer and outcast, evinced sympathy, interest, and emotion. Drawing a deep breath, he said, in continuation :—

“ Mr Napier, I have said I have every reason to believe your brother lives ; and now I will go on, and tell what passed between me and my confederates. My return must have been anxiously looked for ; for, as I entered the house after I had conveyed your brother on board the schooner, I saw Mr Neville pacing the room in a wild, disordered manner. He seized me by the arm, and cried :—

“ ‘ I did not murder him ! Before God I swear I did not. You know I did not, Armstrong. I saw him move. I am not guilty,—I only defended myself ;’ and he pleaded earnestly to me to substantiate his assertions. Wilton’s eye was on me : he was sitting at a table writing. He scanned us both, and said calmly :—

“ ‘ Don’t provoke Armstrong’s enmity, Neville ; and don’t worry him : his favour now is necessary to your life. Affairs will assume a very complicated nature, unless he agrees to protect you.’

“ I saw at once what Wilton desired : through my connivance in his plans, he could wind toils around his companion from which he could not disentangle himself. I answered Neville, ‘ It is a very awkward business : I saw *all* that transpired ; and I fear, Mr Neville, you did the mischief. Wilton gave me a

nod of approval, and, as Neville flung himself upon a couch, crushed in spirit, it seemed, by my words, the former beckoned me to him, and said, in a low voice :—

“ ‘Is all safe?’ I nodded an affirmative. ‘Well,’ continued he, for Neville to hear, ‘this is what I have prevailed on Mr Neville to do for you. He gives you his bond, which provides you with an annuity of £300, providing you leave England until it will be safe for you to return. Here it is; but before you receive it, you must give an acknowledgment: in this form, you see, I have sketched it for you.’

“I cast my eye over it, and saw that it was simply a kind of receipt for a bond, purporting to pay me on behalf of Mr Neville, an annuity of £300 for secret service done. I signed it without reflection, and then Wilton took it up, and said, with ill-concealed triumph :—

“ ‘Your safety, my friend Armstrong, together with Mr Neville’s, rests with me. Act discreetly, and count on my protection.’

“I understood him in a moment: I saw how he had schemed to entrap me, by leaguering me with William Neville; but for the secret behind, his

cunning would have outwitted me. But he did not know *all*, or he would not have risen from the table to well satisfied with his own machinations.

“The same morning he forged a letter, and despatched me with it to Mrs Henry Napier, asserting that her husband had been embroiled in an affair in a gambling-house, and was compelled to fly the country; soon after which he waited upon her, and they left for Paris. Mr Neville and I followed. I have gleaned to-night the fact that the conduct pursued towards that unfortunate lady is known. About this time Wilton commenced to exercise his falsely obtained authority over Neville. There was a good deal said about Miss Neville, and bitter contentions between them. I cared little about the struggle. Neville hated me because he knew he was in my power, and I had injured him in the turn I had given to events in reference to the fray with Mr Napier to please Wilton; and as for myself, knowing I had done Neville injury, I was well disposed to reciprocate his aversion. Wilton and his companion left Paris. Mrs Henry Napier was left under my charge. I had other matters in hand; besides, I did not like the task, and performed it carelessly. She effected an escape. Some



time passed. I drew on my *patrons* pretty freely. Wilton remonstrated : I did not care for him, and told him so. A curious correspondence resulted. He never suspected that Mr Napier lived ; but I conclude he took me for a mad, reckless fellow, who, to be revenged on him, if he did not comply with my terms, would betray my knowledge of the gambling-house transaction, and involve him in difficulties.

“ I began at the same time to plan a scheme of opening your eyes, Mr Napier, as to your brother’s actual position, when it chanced that I received a letter from the captain of the schooner. He told me that your brother had sunk under the effects of brain fever. Do not be alarmed. I afterwards found out that he had outwitted me ; but not until lately. My position, on receiving this intelligence, was suddenly reversed. I could do nothing,—neither approach you nor exercise my old authority over Wilton. I roamed about, maddened with the turn events had taken. Suddenly you were on my trail : I was hunted hither and thither. Wilton incited me with all kinds of lies about you, and I was ripe for any venture ; for I perceived if I was taken my life was at stake. Nor was I less harassed about a month ago, on meeting one of my old ship-mates accidentally at G—— ; and he informed me

that my confederate, the captain of the schooner, had deceived me. His report of the death of the passenger he had on board was a falsehood,—that whilst detained for nearly a month, by contrary gales of wind in the Channel, the stranger had recovered, and, under a pledge of secrecy, and promise of rich reward to the captain, he had been landed on the coast of Devonshire.”

Napier was about to speak, when Mr Langton, after directing an inquiring eye on Mr Pearson, said :—

“ You have omitted some very important evidence in your confession. There was a plot against Mr Charles Napier’s life, to be put in execution during his visit to England in the early part of this year : Was there any one besides yourself engaged in this affair ? ”

“ Ha ! ” cried Armstrong, visibly disturbed ; “ you hinted just now you knew of that business, and which this gentleman,” pointing to Pearson, “ frustrated. Well ! I suppose it must all come out.” And then speaking in his old hardened manner, he continued,—“ I was the only person concerned, and you may guess why. You were too hard upon my trail. I had just received the false report of Mr Henry Napier’s death. I had no way

to turn—self-preservation seemed to point to further violence. I was more the slave of Wilton than ever. I had been driven out of France by the police ; even in the disguise I assumed I barely escaped detection. If I had been taken, I could substantiate nothing—I should have been self-convicted. I escaped to London. Wilton suddenly appeared at my lodgings. He told me all about Mr Napier's resolution to capture me ; incited me to hatred by tales of persecution my friends had met with at Mr Napier's hands ; and, moreover, that spies were searching me out even in England. And he proposed that I should strike at once, as Mr Napier had that very day arrived in London ; and this he knew, because Mr Napier's valet was in his pay, and was hastening on to S——, then to Vallis, to obtain some additional information about me. Wilton's cunning and my own difficulties hemmed me in, and I felt little repugnance to execute the scheme of violence which Wilton proposed. Besides, by linking myself with Wilton in this affair, I madly conceived I should regain the influence which I had all but lost."

"Plainly spoken," remarked Langton. "Do you know who it was that betrayed your villanous purpose, and thus enabled Mr Napier's friends to

guard him against the fate you designed for him?"

"No," was the answer, "Wilton and I stood alone in the business."

"Well, it was Wilton who betrayed you," replied Mr Langton. "He addressed a note to a gentleman, whom he knew to be zealously attached to Mr Napier's interests, informing him, that a lawless villain, of the name of Armstrong, had sworn to assassinate Mr Napier. Having, in a singular manner, gained a knowledge of the plot, he gave warning that steps might be taken to frustrate it. Cannot you understand the reason of his acting thus?"

"No; it is beyond my comprehension," answered Armstrong, moodily, and evidently ill at ease; fearing, no doubt, that Wilton had been beforehand with him, and thus he had, by his candid admissions, contributed evidence of self-conviction. But Langton told him that he had no intention of entrapping him; he only wished to prove how completely he had been duped throughout by Wilton.

"Can you comprehend this much, that a master-mind in roguery is quick to observe a point whereon a confederate is likely to overreach him? Self-pre-

servation has an all-observant eye. In your assumption of security, you awakened Wilton's suspicions. He was not quite sure of you, and he determined, you see, to implicate you in some additional act of violence, to give the law a claim upon you, or to restore his authority by picking you out of the pit he had dug for you. Or, it might be, that by disclosing your name and purpose, he wished to seal a neighbourhood against you, where, had you loitered long, you would have been placed in possession of facts which would have rendered you more inimical to his interests than he could afford."

"I perceive it all," cried Armstrong. "Yes, the plan was altered when we reached S—. Clever villain! the twig was well limed: how could I have escaped?"

"No question but through his supplying Mr Napier's friends with false information, relative to the manner and place in which the deed was to be committed. This we cannot regret, for I see clearly enough that the same will be the cause of his own condemnation."

"Yes, I will be even with him yet," cried Armstrong, fiercely, not, however, correctly taking Langton's words,—“even if I peril my own neck;”

and revengeful dark passions lowered over the man's countenance.

Pearson, during the latter part of this conversation, had been evidently very restless. As it was concluded, he said, in a different voice to that he had before used in Napier's presence,—“Enough, thank God for great clemency. I am a man once more—out of the urn of fortune, good has come.”

Napier, who was about to speak, no doubt to elicit, if possible, some further information concerning his brother, stood as if spell-bound.

“That voice, Langton,—that voice! it bewilders my senses;” and he clung to his friend's arm, incapable of thought. With a silent motion, Pearson intimated a desire for Langton to lead his friend from the room, and then he followed. “What, in the name of Heaven, does *he* mean?” said Napier, hoarsely, as he stood in an apartment, as he thought, alone with Langton. He looked up with the icy coldness of mortal fear, when he saw him, who had so long perplexed him,—that strange man Pearson, who had more than once stood between him and destruction—who had so deep a claim upon his gratitude, cast his rude disguise from off his head; and then, with an overwhelming cry of joy, clasp him to his heart.

“My brother! saviour of my life and honour! pardon, pardon the torture to which my wilful conduct has subjected you!”

\* \* \* \*

Langton was all energy and agitation. The Count Molé had spoken his gratulations, though he had delicately refrained from alluding to the circumstance which inspired him with so deep an interest in Harry Napier's welfare. An hour had passed, and Langton came to his friends, cloaked and ready for immediate travel. To Charles he said, “I can well believe your heart is too enlarged for peace; that joy is so omnipotent, that your mind cannot settle to a rational idea; that you cannot yet realize the happiness which will accrue to those you best love, from so unexpected and grateful a termination of your long, arduous search. But this you will both understand;” and he took Henry Napier's hand as he spoke, “that no time must be lost. Dr Powell's summons must be attended to, as it is possible that the lives, or at least the happiness of others rest on my promptitude. You will follow me when the necessary depositions are taken, to ensure you,” still looking on Harry Napier, “from trouble. You must not appear at Vallis in the old disguise now. Need I say, guard Arm-

strong well ; and, Napier," now addressing his old friend, " open the packet in your possession when you are more collected—read it together—until we meet. Happiness for me lingers still."

Charles Napier roused himself from the languor of his joy, and said, in a quivering voice, to his friend:—

" Langton, nothing can be revealed that can warp my heart from its regard and gratitude. *He* is found ;" and his eye was bent on his brother's noble form. " Without your friendship, Vallis would have been still closed to *us*. It is open now ; dearer to us than its wealth and beauty. Honour smiles on the old place still, and happiness. Hasten then, good friend, and prepare their hearts for a coming joy."



CHAPTER VIII.

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WE left Mr Langton and Dr Powell travelling post-haste to Mowbray. At first Dr Powell was too much surprised to question his companion, but after a short time his remark was,—“ Why to Mowbray ? ”

Langton answered :—

“ Your messenger followed me to Naples. No doubt your fears have been confirmed. Miss Neville’s mind must be disburdened of its horror ? ”

“ Since that messenger started,” said Dr Powell, “ a more disastrous circumstance has occurred than I anticipated. At present, it is out of your power to benefit Miss Neville.” And he gave an account of Ellen’s sad state. When he had finished, he observed,—“ Now for your explanations ; but first let me check this pace ; it is awful on such a night. Besides, I question the prudence of your presenting yourself at Vallis or Mowbray at this hour.”

Langton quickly detailed the facts which have been recorded in the last chapter. Dr Powell's deep astonishment can be conceived, and his satisfaction was in keeping with the untiring zeal we have seen him evince in the welfare of the Napiers. When Dr Powell *could* exercise some authority over thought, he saw that Langton's fiery haste would be injurious to the welfare of his patients; and he represented to his companion the necessity of extreme caution in regard to the Lady Inez. "I know how deeply you feel on her account," Dr Powell said, "but we must proceed in the extraordinary revelation which must be made to her with great care and delicacy. The anxiety of the Lady Inez, on account of Miss Neville, combining with her own sensitive fears, has operated so injuriously on her feeble spirits, that so vast a reaction as your glad tidings injudiciously told would occasion, would prove sorely dangerous to her life: in fact, I dread the effect upon her, though broken in the most guarded manner. She has schooled her heart to sorrow and adversity, and bears her lot without quailing; but the sudden return of such happiness as her sensitive soul creates out of her husband's love, will be a surprise too vast for her slight physical strength. Such is my conscientious opinion.

To Miss Neville your intelligence at present can be of no avail. Therefore, now we are at the gates of Mowbray, you had better allow me to pay my professional visit, and then we return together to S——, where we can decide on our plans for the morrow." Langton reluctantly subscribed to Dr Powell's views.

A few days after Ellen's attack, Mary Napier and her mother hastened to Mowbray, anxious to perform the good offices of friendship and affection. Mary's heart was earnest in its desire to nurse her dear friend Ellen, but her place was filled; charity had already performed well. That individual, who had entered Mowbray at so sad a period of its history, had made Ellen's sick-room her home. The household stood in wonderment at *her* devotion; whilst her health lasted, Ellen's interests were in safe and tender keeping. Still mother and daughter stood, contrary to the wish of Ellen's nurse, by the sufferer's couch, and they heard poor Ellen's commune,—in the fitfulness of delirium,—with that gaunt spectre which so despotically ruled over her night of intellect. I cannot chronicle their emotion, nor the sympathy and gentleness which Ellen's stranger friend and nurse lavished on Mary Napier, as she bore her almost fainting, away from that

dread chamber. When the Napiers left Mowbray, they felt almost incapable of reflection. It is a sad, hard labour for the mother to impose the bitter conviction on her heart, that her fondly treasured hopes are blotted out from the records of reality. Time only can bind up the sheaves of the harvest of such affliction. An evil deed done on her poor Harry had fallen on the mother's ear, and now alone in her own chamber, how bitter indeed to reflect on what her ear had heard ! Shortly, poor Inez claimed her attention,—how could she reveal the bitter fact,—deliver the final blow,—tell her that that trance-like hope which held her to life was a sad delusion ? Charles should be recalled. Such was her decision, and then this heavy calamity be made known. Lady Napier's distressing thoughts were interrupted by the entrance of Fanny Churchhill, who walked to Lady Napier's side, and said, with an earnest, supplicating voice :—

“ Let me go to *her*, dear lady ? Do not refuse my prayer ; Miss Napier has told me all. I know how bitterly you feel,—a life-long devotion is yours ; but now, at such an hour, my place is at that poor sufferer's side.” Fanny's face was very pale, and there was an expression in it which said more than her words, as she added, laying her hand upon her

breast,—“The hope of being of service at Mowbray is all that pleads for life here.”

Lady Napier drew the poor trembler to her bosom, and spoke tenderly, earnestly to her, but evidently in expostulation. Lady Napier, however, could not prevail on her. By the morrow's dawn there was one other watchful nurse in Ellen Neville's sick-chamber.

There was small peace vouchsafed to the inmates of Vallis from the hour of that visit to Mowbray to the present time. This morning Mary Napier stood on the balcony, which commanded a view of the vale, and her eye was bent on the Mowbray road, for she expected a messenger with tidings of her friend. He came not, and then her glance wandered over the grove, and it fell in sadness on many a spot that had known the mirthful revels of her childhood with the afflicted Ellen,—with her lost brother, Harry,—with the long absent Charles. Her soft sweet countenance, in which the living spirit of bright joyous things would delight to dwell, had a pensive care over it. It was a lovely morning, but Mary's kind heart was sorely troubled. The language of the visible creation,—that flowering of the great universal thought,—spoke not to her of its charmed secrets as of yore. Sorrow had chained imagination.

Drawing a light scarf over her bosom, Mary descended to a small flower-garden that had long been her peculiar charge, and approached a bed of violets, with the intention of plucking some for Inez; and as the messenger, for whom she looked so anxiously, came not, it appeared she was resolved to go forth and meet him, for she passed through a door at the end of her garden that communicated with the park, from which spot she commanded a view of the main avenue to the house. She had not proceeded far, when, in the distance, she espied an equestrian directing his course with speed towards the mansion. At a second glance, her emotion and astonishment almost overpowered her, for she had recognised in the new comer the well-known form of Langton. Pausing for a moment, with her hand upon her bosom, to control the throbbing of her startled heart, she turned, and was about to retrace her steps to gain composure, perhaps, before she met *him*; but the thought was discarded almost as soon as entertained, and stepping forth into the avenue, she stood directly in the horseman's path.

As Mary threw back the exuberant auburn locks which the light breeze had scattered over her pale forehead, and her upraised head displayed the bright

flush which *such* a surprise had called into her cheek, deliberation or reflection seemed quite cast aside by the horseman. He sprang down, and hastened on, we may say with a heart *over-weighted* with its emotion ; for, before either well knew what they were about, the secret of their affection for each other was disclosed. Deep, earnest sentiment was in Langton's gaze, as he bent over the trembling girl, whose hand rested in his, with a sweet touching confidence. He had never seen her,—even with his partial eye,—so beautiful, so fascinating as now. And why ? Was not the pulse of the treasured secret throbbing in her cheek, and beaming through the soft light of gentleness and modesty ? Upon her cheek, and in her soft blue eye, was the *sense* of ambition gratified, and blending with the pure gleam which sensibility adds to endow feminine loveliness. Still, Langton saw disquietude beneath the nervous joy. He felt blessed in the authority which he held to dispel it. He would not have bartered it for a monarch's ransom.

At first, Mary naturally concluded that *their* sudden meeting, the sudden betrayal of what she thought she had secret from him, was the origin of the bright and happy expression which rested on Langton's countenance ; but when she had

somewhat recovered her composure, and commenced questioning him relative to her brother Charles, she was silenced by his still glowing delight. A bright eye read the secret of her trouble, and it proclaimed the grace and vivacity of hope. She could not longer refrain from saying, in a voice of deep apprehension: "Speak, speak! What *can* you mean?"

Lady Napier had noticed Langton's arrival; her emotions were of a more fixed and decided character than Mary's,—the mother's soul was with them; and with hasty and faltering steps she sought her visiter. She was too agitated, or too busy with her own thoughts, to notice the confiding manner in which her daughter hung upon Langton's arm; and drawing close to him, and unperceived by them, as he bent his head to reply to Mary's question, she cried in a voice of acute fear: "My son, Mr Langton, where is Charles? are you the herald of further misery?" She could say no more, but stood in an attitude of expressive sorrow, waiting his reply.

"Dear Lady Napier," he answered, guardedly, curbing his deep joy; "I have to report news which will strengthen you in hope, which should dry up the fountain of your tears, and turn sorrow



to a life-long gladness. You have now grounds for a joyful surprise,—your prayers will be fulfilled; Charles is well, and Harry lives to claim your love and esteem."

Lady Napier stood with clasped hands; her breath seemed to fail her at the moment. At last tears burst from her eyes, her lips moved, and she said, but scarcely above a whisper: "*Thou* who hast upheld me in my afflictions, regulate my joy, or my heart will burst!"

Mary had not relinquished Mr Langton's arm whilst her mother spoke; and during his reply she had stood with both her hands clasped over it, gazing with wondering surprise into his face; but now as she heard her mother's words, and more fully comprehended the meaning of them, she flung herself into her parent's arms, sobbing, "Mother, mother!"

\* \* \* \* \*

They entered Vallis House guardedly—guardedly on account of the lady Inez, as lady Napier hinted; but Langton would have flown to her at once, which indiscreet wish the grateful mother discountenanced, adding in reply, "The lady Inez is confined to her chamber;" thus delicately intimating that so sad a fact was quite a sufficient

reason to deter him from giving a second thought to such a step. Long, affecting, and eager explanations were given and received,—tears and smiles mingled,—admiration, gratitude blended. One moment the long-lost Harry was the theme : his devotion to them, under his impenetrable disguise, during a time of such horror, from the stigma under which he laboured, more than atoned for the sorrows which his errors occasioned them. And then Charles was in the heart the hero of family love, the saviour of their honour ; till dwelling on the new-created pride, so magnified from comparison with the melancholy past, the mother's heart was reduced to the simplicity of a grateful child's."

\* \* \* \* \*

"But why could not dear Harry have eased our minds by giving us some private intimation of his presence in this neighbourhood?" asked Mary Napier through her tears.

Langton said : "You forget that awful bar. I can believe he trembled before his own presence, knowing himself innocent of premeditated crime ; still, had he been found in England through Wilton's evil scheming, hoodwinked justice would have branded him as a murderer, and his name would have been blotted out from the records of honour and

humanity. Poor fellow! those many hours of solitude,—how fearful! within sight of friends so dear,—so near to, and yet separated so far from, one heart that lived only for him. Noble spirit! how he maintained his presence of mind is to me a mystery. When we think of his unobtrusive, yet watchful guardianship, the fire of his friendship in time of danger, his benevolence, his active charity in the neighbourhood around, we cannot fail to see how nobly he has turned from the labyrinth of error, into which unguarded impulse guided him, and that adversity has richly developed the latent virtues of his soul. He forgot himself for you all,” Langton continued, with generous warmth, “and few are there in this world who could have kept self so thoroughly in the background. I feel with him, that as false circumstances swayed his destiny, and so foul a blot rested on his name, death, in which we were fain to picture him, was preferable to life with that horror at his heart.”

“You are right, he was right,—my noble-minded Harry!” cried lady Napier. “To have met you in secrecy, and have had to school my heart to the extinction of every memory of honour and worth, would have been a living death to me, for with ruin would have come despair.”

"And how *can* we reward you?" remarked lady Napier, when Langton had given full particulars of all that passed in Paris and Naples.

Mary's eye suddenly sank as these words fell. *She* knew full well the reward he sought, and she trembled from emotion, as he answered with deep feeling:—

"By permitting me, dear lady Napier, when your happiness is secured, to hope that mine may claim a mother's interest."

Poor Mary's confusion was palpable now. Langton almost repented having spoken so significantly. The mother's heart was suddenly awake,—she was taken by surprise; and though her sympathies were quite with Langton, she was alarmed. True, he was a noble, high-minded man; all that she knew of him was great and good in generous acts. He had been the true friend in affliction, the protector of her younger son through peril and danger, a faithful guardian of his life, and now the messenger of tidings which sunned her heart in bliss; yet what was this he solicited? How could she answer him? And still, whence arose that potent influence which he exercised over her, and almost prompted her to say, even with so vast an interest as her child's happiness before her

sight, "You charm my mind from out the prescribed rules of society, and stand before me the genius of our weal?" She knew not in what form to veil her feelings, and for a few minutes an-expressive silence followed. Before it was broken, Dr Powell and Mr Wilmott were added to the circle. The lady Inez was 'of course the kind physician's first thought. He said:—

"He knew Mr Langton felt with him that no time should be lost in preparing her mind to receive the glad intelligence which he had brought. But the task was a most delicate one, the utmost caution was to be observed."

To lady Napier this serious duty was assigned. She was to strive by a guarded, and, as it must appear, an undesigned effort to lead poor Inez from dwelling upon a nervous fear, until hope had regained authority; then, as nature would be somewhat renovated, Lady Napier would enlarge upon her own confidence in the goodness of Providence, until she saw she might cautiously express her conviction that their dear and anxious wishes would be realized. Mr Langton's presence would then foreshadow the good in store.

Lady Napier repaired direct to the chamber of her much-loved daughter-in-law. Inez was reclin-

ing listlessly on her couch. She had completed her morning toilet, but was evidently too weak to leave her room. Lady Napier's eye rested on the fair, fragile being before her, with more than ordinary expression of interest. There was, indeed, so marked a difference in her whole bearing and demeanour, that Inez became greatly disturbed. Emotion, and that of a different caste from what had been, was beaming in her countenance, and fearing, though silently, that she had betrayed too much, lady Napier moved into an adjoining room to recover her composure. Inez experienced a deep, almost suffocating sensation; a heart less watchful and tremulous than hers would have divined that something out of the common course of events had happened, to bring about so great a change in the bearing of the sedate and guarded matron; faculty and perception were alive—were keenly awakened; her emotion was too great to be endured. She followed lady Napier with tottering steps; and drawing near to her, placed her hand upon her arm, and said tremulously:—

“Does reason respond to the happiness which lights your eye, dear mother? It is the first time you have appeared to me with the countenance of one whose heart is suddenly freed from a wearing

sorrow." Lady Napier wound her arms around the afflicted being, saying :—

"I have had happy dreams, dear Inez ; besides, we are enjoined to possess a bold and cheerful spirit. Courage, my child !" she cried, as Inez uttered a low cry.

"Courage," answered Inez in a dreamy voice, and a quivering of the frame, which proved that even a slight suspicion that her prayers were heard was almost enough to deprive her of the power of thought ; "courage, mother ? alas, it is too late to ask it of me. I feel—I feel as if I were hovering on the brink of the grave."

"There *is* hope of happiness, my love," said lady Napier, at a loss what to say, and alarmed at the sufferer's words.

"Happiness !" observed Inez in the same voice, and trance-like air ; "yes, yes ; but not here. I have often looked back, and seen it in the vista ; but it has at length finally sunk below the horizon of my sight. The delay has been too long. I feel strangely here," placing her hand upon her chest ; "and my head likewise suffers,—sometimes my intellect becomes confused. As you entered my room, dear mother, my brother's voice was softly saying, 'Be of good cheer, Inez : Harry did

not desert you ;' my spirit is reconciled with his. Your strange manner seemed to ratify this glad assurance, but now that comfort has gone again."

Lady Napier's tearful eye told how deeply she felt for the sweet, young being in her arms, thus crushed and distracted. She scarcely knew how to act ; still she decided, as she bore her to a sofa, that it was better for the truth to be told at once : if not, a time would be when poor Inez would possess even less fortitude than now ; therefore, leaning gently over her, lady Napier said tenderly, and with a voice of pure devotion, for the mother's heart recorded its own sense of the especial mercy which had been vouchsafed it :—

"God wills that we should be tried by labour, pain, and sorrow, that we may gather fortitude, and ascribe authority to Him over us. And sometimes it is *His* will to continue the infliction during the space of our mortal existence. Again, dear Inez, it may be that *He*, being satisfied with the manner in which we have submitted to His decree, is pleased to lighten our worldly affliction, to deliver us from the pressure of adversity, and to restore us to that condition of life which enables us with a gladdened heart to acknowledge, that He has been a wise guardian of our happiness. Your



trials have been great; and now, would not your courage return if you were convinced that good effects may spring from distressing causes? Your true friend, Mr Langton, has returned."

"Mr Langton!" interrupted Inez, in a wild, bewildered manner; "is *he* here? oh, let me see *him*. Haste, haste, dear mother; in charity bring *him* to me. You know not how much my heart has panted to meet *him* once more."

Almost as much agitated as the gentle being she had sought to comfort, and utterly confounded by the earnest appeal made, lady Napier left the room; and had a hard task to appear calm, as she entered the apartment, in which she expected to find Mr Langton. A word from her, and Langton was gone, his emotion causing lady Napier an additional burden of astonishment. A stride, it seemed, and he was in the chamber of the poor young wife. As he entered, her feeble arms were wildly extended, and he sank on his knees by her side. Again and again he kissed the pallid cheek, which rested against his breast; and tears, which burst from his noble heart, fell silently, as he gazed upon this sad wreck of beauty and faithfulness.

"Harry will return! dear Walter—do you deceive

me? cried Inez, in a voice of pathetic earnestness. "What do you mean?—Shall I be so blessed?—His honour cleared?—Your friend in heart?—In charity, tell me, or my brain will be on fire!"

"He lives!—In honour and heart my friend!" he answered, again clasping Inez to his breast; and then one sharp, piercing cry was heard within and beyond that room—joy, wild, deep, and intense, was blended with overpowering agony. A voice it was from out the young wife's soul, mysterious and terrible. Almost as helpless as the poor being in his arms, there Langton knelt. Indeed, had he not been so overcome with emotion, he could not have risen from his delicate position before the party he had left, a few minutes previously, was beside him.

Lady Napier and her daughter evinced uncontrollable amazement. Inez had fainted. Dr Powell stood over her. "As I feared—as I feared," he said,—“sadly premature!” And he then recalled Langton to himself, by directing his attention to Lady Napier. The upturned, tearful eye, the grief so vividly marked upon his noble countenance, said more for him than words.

Mary Napier sank by his side, as if that mute

appeal for forbearance had charmed her very intellect away.

"In a few minutes I will relieve you of your painful uneasiness," he said to Lady Napier; and then he gave all his attention to the sufferer. His deep evidences of interest could not be concealed. His features were much convulsed, as Mary gazed upon so mysterious an emotion. All her old, strange suspicions returned, and she hid her eyes with her hands, and sobbed bitterly.

Some time elapsed before Inez recovered from the death-like swoon. As a heavy sigh foretold the return of consciousness, it was distressing to see that her lips were tinged with blood. She attempted to speak—to rise—as she gazed from Lady Napier to Mr Langton, and seemed anxious to say something; but so great a faintness overpowered her that she sank back almost senseless into the arms of the latter. One thought only rested in the partially clouded mind. "Is *he* here?" she said, with so wistful a glance around, and with such deep pathos in the voice, that her listeners could never forget—"Is *he* here? I feel I shall die—the boon is come too late."

"Courage, dear one," cried the troubled man, to

whom she addressed her words; "he has not yet returned; but, Inez, it will not be long before he kneels, as I do now, by your dear side. Inez, you must live for Harry."

"Live for Harry!" she cried, in a voice instinct, for a moment, with life and energy,—"*Live* for him!—Would to God I could live for him!—Die for him—yes!—to testify my devotion. He returns in honour! His poor Inez has not been smitten in vain! She has not been deserted by him! I said so—oh you all know that I said so—he never meant to abandon me. Live! yes;—oh I must live!—live till he returns. Then, when I really feel that he has never severed that pure link which bound me to him, I shall not fear to die!" Her voice sunk almost to a whisper before she had finished speaking. It was the love of the woman—nature alone—that gave her strength to speak at all. For a time she lay so still, it might have been supposed that night had fallen upon her thought—that death had borne her soul across the viewless barrier. But, no! both were still with the present, both thought and soul. Her eyes again opened; and, drawing Mr Langton towards her, she whispered, "Dear Walter, pray for me! Life has lost its shadow and its darkness; the future promises great happiness."—

It was all she said. Nature could endure no more ; she was quite incapable of further speech. The light *had* been too sudden—the rush of joy too overpowering. Life all but retired in the contest between *it* and the woman-heart, mighty only in its faithfulness.

With a deep sigh, Mr Langton arose from his knees ; and as Dr Powell requested to be left alone with his patient, the former took Mary Napier's hand, and, turning to her mother, said, with grave earnestness, " Dear madam, may I beg you to afford me a few minutes of your time ? I have much to discuss, which cannot fail to interest you."

Lady Napier gravely bowed her head, as she silently followed him. No word passed on the way to the library ; and even on their arrival there, Mr Langton stood some moments without speaking, and scarcely less agitated than those whose minds he was most anxious to relieve of uneasiness and bewilderment. At last, his eye was raised to Lady Napier's countenance, and, with a voice in which there was inquiry, he said, " Have I acted my part so well, that you have had no suspicions ?"

" I have ever trusted you ;" answered Lady Napier, " from the first hour of introduction ; and, trusting you, believed your own assertions ; and

that the guise in which you appeared before us was natural and honest. An hour ago, I would have borne prompt testimony to your integrity; but now I am bewildered; for sincerity intrigues not. Speak quickly; tell me what you mean by acting a part.—I feel confident that there is a secret attached to you.”

“And you,” he said, with nervous gentleness to Mary, who stood with confusion and sympathy united in her sweet face. Her cheek flushed deeply as she replied:—

“Oh you cannot be capable of unkind, ungenerous deception—I will trust you still—as I have” .....she checked herself here, and then added,—  
“Do, pray, in pity of our uneasiness, explain the mystery which hangs about you.”

“I will,” he cried with a bright, grateful smile.  
“And now, dear madam,” he continued, turning frankly to Lady Napier, “in a nephew, you must pardon the presumption of the stranger Langton; and may not Walter Curran, dear cousin,” gazing fondly on Mary, “hold, at least, an equal place with him in your regard?”

“Walter Curran!” echoed both mother and daughter in a breath,—“How strange!—How extraordinary!—Can your words be true?”

“They are,” answered our friend, “on my sa-

cred word of honour, I am Walter Curran, the brother of that poor, afflicted creature we have just left. I see you are astonished, and it is natural you should be so ; still, dear madam, believe me, you have the sincere assurance of the truth of my statement, and from one, you must feel, who has zealously laboured for more than a year to serve you and yours."

Then, leading Lady Napier to a seat, and gently detaining Mary, who would have left the room, evidently greatly oppressed through the confusion of her own thoughts, he said :—

"I entreat your attention, for a few minutes, for now that the mask is thrown aside, candour only is becoming. I will now tell you why I have pursued a course which, at first sight, appears disingenuous and improper. I need go back no further than the receipt of a letter, in India, from Sir Eardley Napier, which contained a candid explanation of family differences between us. He urged my return to England, and assured me of a most cordial welcome. I have that letter in my possession. At the time of its receipt, I was suffering from a severe wound, and, therefore, my departure was protracted. But, when I was sufficiently strong to quit my quarters, I obtained leave, and sailed in the vessel which was un-

fortunately wrecked on the French coast last January. I was the sole passenger, out of many, that escaped from a watery grave. The whole night and the following day, I was tossed, here and there, at the mercy of the waves; and, as the wind shifted each hour, I drew more into mid-channel. Towards the close of night, some twenty hours after I had committed myself to the waves, and at a time when I had seriously resigned myself to my fate, I suddenly heard voices near; and, almost before I had thanked God for the boon, I was dragged into a boat, manned by foreigners. They addressed me in Spanish, and, although much exhausted, I endeavoured to give a clear statement of the disaster which led to my position; and, as I did this in their own tongue, they treated me with kindness and consideration. It proved that my perilous state had been observed from the topmast of a Spanish brig, bound to Cadiz.

“After a short time had been allowed me to recruit, the captain asked my wishes; and, as my first object, on landing in England, would have been to have hastened to Spain, to be reunited to my dear mother, I explained my desire to proceed with the vessel to Spain; to which the captain readily acceded. I



reached my home, with a joyful heart, anticipating the most exquisite delight. Alas! the old mansion was inhabited by strangers. I learnt that my poor mother was dead; and that my sister, that poor stricken being to whom I have been restored at so distressing a moment, had eloped, some ten weeks previous, with an Englishman of the name of Hargrave, who had seduced her affections, and they concluded with dishonourable intent. It was some days before I was well able to struggle against the horror and anguish I experienced at this double blow of affliction.

“ At last, I went to Seville. I found a sealed packet awaiting me there in the event of my return. It was in the handwriting of poor Inez; and two letters were enclosed. One said that she had written to inform me of our mother’s death; having discovered that the account of my mortal wound (received in an engagement in India, and which hastened my mother’s death) was exaggerated; and, supposing I should return from India before a second communication reached me, she had taken this course to acquaint me with the step she had ventured on; and she conveyed to me the intelligence, that the man to whom she had entrusted her honour and happiness was her cousin

and mine—your son Henry, dear madam. The other letter was written by my dear mother, and dated some days prior to the evil tidings which had reached her, relative to my mortal danger. Therein she placed me in possession of the secret of my connexion with your family ; conjuring me to return home, as she feared her sojourn in this life would not be protracted long. And, with a true mastery over pride and injury (pardon the word), she expressed an earnest hope, that I would become reconciled to her relatives, and strive to the utmost of my power to convince her brother, Sir Eardley Napier, that she had long ceased to remember with a thought of anger the injustice of his conduct towards her and hers. Her last words were, ‘ My son will not dishonour his parent’s grave, by turning a deaf ear to her injunctions.’

“ My feelings were wildly agitated. Inquiry tended to prove, that him in whom poor Inez had reposed her honour had been unfaithful ;—and I, a brother—a soldier—who had been educated in a school that taught me that sharp and fiery punishment was the meed of conduct such as Henry Napier was supposed to have practised, was sorely circumstanced. How should I act towards him—him who had robbed my sister of her honour ? How could I approach Sir Eardley now, although

I possessed the letter which hinted of recompense, a thousand times more ample than my due?" and the speaker's eye rested for a moment tenderly on Mary Napier, who hung with almost breathless interest on his words. "It was impossible to fulfil my mother's wishes, my own earnest desires. At all events, I had first a positive duty to fulfil, that was clear,—its result would regulate my after-conduct. My relatives in Seville agreed to be governed by my instructions, and I resolved on concealing my return from my English friends, until the dark doubt, concerning my poor sister, was cleared up. With fiery haste I traversed France, reached Paris, and instituted the most vigilant inquiry. My sister had been living there in seclusion, which argued ill, and had departed with the fictitious Hargrave for England, a week or ten days prior to my arrival. Wilton's name and William Neville's were mixed up with your son's.

"My steps were turned towards this country: I could hear no tidings of poor Inez. I came into this neighbourhood, and for a time, through the connivance of Dr Powell (with whom I found, from letters bequeathed to me, my mother had held communication), I passed under the assumed name of Langton. You can understand that there was, to all appearances, a grievous calamity to be explained, washed out, or

adjusted, before Walter Curran could face his relatives in his proper person. In my disguise, I met Sir Eardley ; I saw in his countenance, sorrows which he thought unseen. I made myself familiar with his character, and, as far as he was concerned, I could have followed to the letter my mother's commands. I learned your zeal and charity, dear madam, and noted (again glancing towards Mary) in secret this your sweet helpmate in offices of mercy and goodness. My friend, Charles, too, underwent an examination. I saw him at Oxford : to see him was to admire him. As Mr Langton, I had an opportunity of privately proving his character and estimating his worth : we are dear friends for life. I likewise met the same day both Wilton and William Neville,—I read the character of the former, and I felt assured that the latter was the tool of a dangerous character ; and I saw likewise, and drew my conclusions from it, that Wilton was anxious to excite my cousin to a quarrel with him ; and I heard enough from Mr Neville's remarks, to be aware, that Charles would meet resolute foes in them. I again returned to this neighbourhood, with a mind still torn with strange fears, apprehensions, and mistrust, as I found so long a period had transpired since you had received the slightest in-

telligence of your elder son. You are aware, from events which occurred, that no feeling, inimical to the welfare of the honourable members of your family, regulated my actions. Mr Langton's evidences of interest were apparent, but Walter Curran could not take his place amongst you, whilst so bitter a stigma rested on the head of the chief of your name.

"Events quickly followed, which proved that I had formed a correct estimate of your goodness and charity. My poor sister was taken to your hearts, without a doubt, without a suspicion of her truth; and facts were disclosed, which represented Sir Henry as less criminal than I had supposed him, though not less cruel and heartless. This was not a time for explanations; but as dishonour was not attached to my sister's name, I entered with a new heart into the labour which Charles has so ably conducted, and brought to so gratifying a termination. During my visit here, as Mr Langton, I revealed myself to Inez, and bound her to secrecy,—a hard necessity to enforce upon her; but I succeeded. Events occurred which shook the opinions I had formed in reference to Sir Henry's conduct. We went to Paris; then I soon came to believe that some dark

deed had been committed, and by whom I need not say. And, conceive my delight, when we at length discovered, that the poor persecuted Harry was guiltless of evil to Inez, that he lived to be restored to her, and to receive my sincere regrets for the injury I had done him, in regarding him in a light so inimical to his honour. Conceive my joy, dear madam, when I found I could return to Vallis House, the harbinger of such rare news to dear Inez and to yourselves ; and here, stripping off my disguise, could say to you, ' Estimate my character by the feelings you are aware animated him, in whom Walter Curran's zeal and faithfulness was embodied, and allow me to prove, through a life-long friendship for yourself and your family, that though I have been compelled to practise deception, falsehood can have no commerce with my heart in its thoughts, and its hopes for its relatives.' "

He had finished, and Lady Napier immediately extended her hand, saying, with much sensibility :

" Your candid explanation dispels all doubt, and relieves me of the duty of questioning you. You are a noble being, and you have my entire confidence. You have always held a singular power over me—I recognise its origin. You are

my nephew, and next to my own children. Walter Curran, your happiness shall claim a prayer." He pressed her extended hand earnestly to his lips, and said :—

"I am a stranger amongst you no longer."

"I must now leave you," remarked Lady Napier, rising from her seat. "You are aware my presence is required elsewhere. I go with a lighter heart than I possessed when I entered this room ;" and she left the apartment.

Walter Curran, for so must I now designate our old friend Mr Langton, in no way interfered with Lady Napier's decision. In fact, he seemed singularly pleased she had taken the idea into her head, that she was wanted somewhere else. But Mary rose too, as if she meant to follow her mother. She moved a few steps, undecided however ; and suddenly her cheek, which had been very pale, bore the flush of fire ; neck and brow were crimson. A light step was by her side,—his fondness, his tenderness, his deep impassioned love (as her eyes were raised to him in touching faith), sank deep within her soul ; and the instant after, *Walter Curran* had taken the liberty *Mr Langton* had indulged in, in the morning, with singular audacity.

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"After so well-practised a disguise, how can I trust you? Who can say you will not turn out some oriental despot after all?"

"Fortune has been sufficiently prodigal, my beloved; I would not forego Mr Langton's privilege to be the monarch of your glorious country."

"Ah! I have often given *him* honest thanks for saving me from that dreadful Walter Curran. What shall I do for him now?" she asked, smiling gently on her dear cousin.

"Bless *him* still," he answered, with emotion, "for blending duty with affection."



CHAPTER IX.

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A FORTNIGHT passed, a fortnight of deep anxiety and heart-watching, at Mowbray and Vallis. Ellen Neville had weathered the storm. Youth and a good constitution triumphed over the malady, which at one time threatened so disastrous a termination. Still she was reduced to such an excess of weakness, that life seemed quite dependent upon care and skilful treatment. With a return of consciousness, a bitter anxious brooding followed. What of her brother? How had he fared? In what position was he placed? Such were her thoughts, but she could not satisfy them. How could she reveal so terrible a secret? for she naturally concluded, that independent of those so criminally implicated, she alone knew of the fate which had overtaken Henry Napier. There seemed little consolation for her—her terrible promise would have to be fulfilled. It had been delayed, no more; the pledge

she had given must be redeemed, and all the old horrors flowed back upon her enfeebled mind. Her watchful nurses, perceiving that the mind of their charge was still fettered to deep anxieties, expressed their fears to Dr Powell, that a relapse would ensue. The worthy Dr Powell had likewise his fears. He knew the evil consequences of a dark dread lurking in an enfeebled mind. He had likewise witnessed the sad result of such apprehension being suddenly removed. It was a delicate task ; he would undertake it himself. He did so. He mildly pointed out to his patient, how unwise a thing it was to anticipate misfortune. He argued with her in this spirit, until he saw she was aware he had some motive in gathering in comfort for her, and then, when he believed her mind partially disenthralled from its fear, he consoled her with the assurance, that her brother was not guilty of the deed which haunted her imagination ; that Henry Napier's life had been wonderfully preserved ; and therefore she would not be severed from the hope of bestowing happiness on those who relied upon her energies.

"Henry Napier's life preserved," she said, faintly ; "Did you say his life?"

"I did, under the disguise and the assumed name of Pearson, he has been long in this neighbour-

hood. Now, in his proper person, he is shortly expected to rejoin his friends at Vallis."

Ellen Neville's first emotion was astonishment, but she was too weak, too agitated, to question Dr Powell. She lay quite still for some little time, and then a sudden and extraordinary interest lighted her face. The blight was suddenly shaken from that dear heart; by a word her mind was freed from the dark tyranny of evil apprehension. From this hour she subscribed to whatever Dr Powell enjoined, and quite astonished her attendants by her rapid convalescence. With a mind incited by the purest ambition, she again became her father's companion and comforter. He could not resist her thrilling, expressive tenderness. She told him all. She made him see the good to them. She showed him whence such succour came, and that cares were not calamities.

Of her brother, Ellen Neville knew nothing more than that he had quitted the country the night of his confession to Dr Powell. It was therefore deemed advisable for him to remain absent for a time, but he would ultimately return, such was her belief; and when he was restored to his old home, the sum of her happiness would be *near* completion.

At Vallis House things were different. The case of poor Inez was a despairing one. The mind, however, retained its faculties. She was conscious of her sad situation. Still the eye was bright; no symptom of despondency exhibited itself, until some ten days after her brother's return. Then it became different with her: the sunken cheek, the short abrupt cough, the hectic flush, foretold the melancholy fact of the separation which would shortly ensue between her and her tender friends. Yet it seemed possible that her soul would not wing its flight until the craving of her heart was appeased. For the most part of her time, she was still calm and resigned. Her fervent prayer, however, was often followed by the question,—“Is he come?” and, she would remark, when she found she had yet to wait,—“My breath grows faint, my strength is gone; Harry, do not linger long!” Her case was beyond the reach of medicine. Dr Powell pronounced that there was no hope of her living beyond a few days. A vessel in the lungs had given way. Her strength was so feeble, that there was no chance of warding off the onward progress of that malady which possesses the master-craft to deceive. Poor Inez bore all her physical ills without murmur or complaint. She did not suffer much pain, but when

she was encouraged to hope, a sweet, sad smile would linger a moment on her lip; and then she would gravely shake her head, and as she pointed to the hectic flush on her sunken cheek, say, with her hand upon her bosom,—“The asp is busy here.”

Walter Curran watched with a deep tender interest by his sister's side. Her sad condition excited his most lively sorrow. There was not a moment that she was absent from his thoughts. They were the only two,—and she was so young, so beautiful, he would have sacrificed the dearest hopes of his life to have given her succour. Mary Napier was sometimes a silent spectator of his devotion, and if anything was needed to strengthen her pure faith in him,—if there was one lurking fear to be dispelled, the compassionate and sympathizing behaviour of the brother was more than an earnest evidence that an honest and feeling heart dwelt within his manly breast. She knew of his intellectual wealth, his rare intelligence,—it was stamped upon his noble brow,—his generosity had been proved,—his daring courage in the field in his proper person, and again, under the disguise he had assumed, had been her alarm and wonder. But now there was cause for more refined pride and

admiration, in perceiving that he possessed those sterling attractions (altogether independent of external beauty), which can only be discovered in innate excellence and gentleness of heart.

On the afternoon of the fourteenth day of Walter Curran's return from Naples, he and Mary Napier both sat by the couch of the suffering Inez. It was one of our bright June evenings, when nature is clad in the garb of youth, and hangs with a smile of hope on expectation of what is to come. The hot breath of summer had not withered a leaf. Inez gazed forth from the open lattice with a wistful, pleading eye ; and presently she said :—

“ The evening is very beautiful,—how gaily the birds sing ! Dear messengers of hope, their present is not clouded by the chill of apprehension. And the breath of those sweet flowers, it goes farther than my sense, and strikes me with a fear and trembling. At such an hour, and at such a time, how intelligent, how expressive, are these evidences of His presence ! He robes every thing, both animate and inanimate, in beauty ; and links a secret with all, and I now feel the reason. But for this secret, what would existence be ? But for the knowledge now that earthly loss is future gain,

what would the present afford? Am I right in venturing on such a subject, dear brother?" taking his hand, and gazing with a secret melancholy into his face. "Should I not speak of *His* presence and *His* omnipotence, under the protection and assistance of dear Mr Wilmott."

"Dear Inez," answered her brother, tenderly, "I am but a poor teacher on so serious a subject. Mr Wilmot, I think, would tell you that it is right to think of God in the harmony and beauty of external life, and that by considering yourself always in His presence, you need not fear that reverence or homage can be ill timed."

"Still, dear Walter," said Inez, thoughtfully; "when Mr Wilmott speaks to me on this subject, I feel as if divine aid, which at a time like this is so necessary to a mind like mine, were then nearer to me. That sublime and animating principle is brought before my understanding by that dear friend, and holy man, with such impressive sincerity, that, independent of the immortal hope his reasoning inspires, I think over (and with benefit to myself), the virtues and merits of the cause which awakens in his breast such pure and fervent zeal. He speaks to me, Walter," she continued,

after a slight pause ; “ of the unstable tenure of life,—the vanity of its illusions,—the mockery of its promises,—and the deception which rests by our dearest expectations. He tells me that the young dreams of our early day are shown to us in a little while as dreams only : that sorrow rests over the brightest of our hopes, and we are made to feel this, and to know there is no permanent resting-place for the fond cravings of the heart : that we may be weaned from thoughts which yield disappointment, to place them under the care of one who is able and willing to give them protection, where alone they can rest in security. And I feel,” Incz added, after another pause ; “ that I lived for a fleeting time in a fairy world adorned by many ideal beauties, but through the error of not ascribing a due limit to imagination and sentiment, my joys have soon turned to fears, my hopes to anxieties. Alas ! ” and as this word fell from her lips she sank back upon the seat and said no more. And alas ! it is to be feared, that even if the yearnings of her pure soul were exalted above this world, that the affections of her woman-nature could not rise in just proportion with them,—and thus the harmony of this solemn hour was out of tune. As



Inez reclined in silence, there was an expression over the whole being which said that the spirit of her young life would not tarry long.....

“Walter, do you think *he* will soon be here? I hope to see *him* for a moment before I die!”

Walter Curran's eyes were filled with tears; the expression of that sweet face, the intelligence of that thrilling voice, said far more than the mere words. Oh, how priceless was such love! To speak of patience and submission seemed to him unsuited, —death waited at the portal of that chamber but for a little while. As he held her hand in his, he could see the pulsation of the artery in the wrist. Her attenuated frame, the vivid transparency of her complexion, the almost unearthly brilliancy of the eye, were sad warnings of the near fulfilment of that fiat so startling, and so severe to the kindred soul.

“Do not weep, dear Walter; console her who has less strength than you,” directing his attention to Mary Napier, whose fortitude was quite gone; and then resting her head upon her brother's shoulder, Inez added:—“Our mother, Walter! her sainted love awaits the coming of her child. We shall meet hereafter. You have been just, and true, and honourable. My hope for you is strong. But

a few months since nature slumbered in her wintry dress of snow ; and see ! she has now awakened to a new existence, a smiling happy one,—and so will our separation be. Life is but a short dream, but in that realm to which I am journeying, its present and its future are alike beautiful and enduring.”

“ This must not be, Major Curran,” said Dr Powell, advancing to the couch of his patient ; “ our duty by the sick-bed is to act, not feel.”

Walter Curran rose from his seat, and then Dr Powell whispered, directing his eye to Mary :—

“ Take her with you, encourage her as you best can. A surprise is at hand.”.....

Dr Powell's finger rested on his patient's pulse. Although grave and calm, there was something, Inez thought, in his manner, whilst speaking to her brother, which was significant.

“ Has aught occurred, Dr Powell ?” asked Inez, very nervously. “ You look as if you were burdened with some intelligence,—you are here before your accustomed hour,—and your whisper to Walter caused him sudden agitation.”

Dr Powell took a seat by the bedside. He did not reply directly to his patient's question, but said :—

“ When a mind, dear Lady Inez, is over-anxious

and expectant, it is seldom satisfied. I wish, with the true physician's anxiety, that you could confine speculation within narrower limits, for it is not good for you to dwell solely on the mutable hopes of this world. You have been sheltered from many real ills,—your present malady is an inheritance from your mother,—the breath of the soft south reared you to womanhood, but as you have been transplanted from the genial soil, no human care would have been able to preserve you to this world for long. You must think of this, and remember that you have lived to find that you have not lavished the affections of your heart on one undeserving: that he thinks of you, prays for you, and yet hopes to receive your pardon for".....

"Pardon," interrupted Inez, in tears. "Oh! speak not of such a restraint, as the word intimates, existing between my heart and his. Could I once more feel my husband near me,—receive once more the warm assurance of his affection for me,—and know that his ear would receive my soul's parting sigh,—then I should believe, with a submissive mind, that we should be reunited in that world which is life with love, and for ever!"

A poorly stifled sob now thrilled on the speaker's ear. Acutely alive to even the most trivial circum-

stance that touched upon the one great thought, she started, and, with lips apart, she hung upon the sound, and said :—

“’T is strange : in mercy tell me what does that sob import.”

Dr Powell stepped aside : it was no stranger form to Inez that supplied his place,—and a voice, —the magic of whose cadence had ever been to her the principle of tenderness and joy,—cried now, in the agony of mortal anguish :—

“Beloved, I am near you ! Harry holds you in his arms ! One look as of old,—one word, my Inez ! Bless me with a glance, or I shall die.”

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For Inez there was no more heart-yearning. The ambition of her pure soul was accomplished. The joy of her woman-heart shone in that sweet face triumphant. The poor drooping lily had caught a ray of sunshine to enable it to smile out its little life. Harry,—the long-lost, the ever fondly treasured,—had returned, only in time to take a last farewell. His agony was such, that after-life ever recalled it with a shudder. But now, often, during that anxious night and day following, he bent his knee to supplicate for her recovery. But the scene

was nigh its close,—this was obvious to all : still she lay,—the happy one amongst the sorrowing,—her head upon his chest, with a smile upon her lip, which said she felt the charity of the gift which had been bestowed upon her.

Two days passed, and then a cold, dread stillness fell over the chamber. No word was uttered after the last fond blessing had been spoken. In a moment's space how changed the position between the watchers there and her whose pulse knew not a lingering throb ! How vast the distance from the living, when over a friend the earthly chapter has been read, and nature has sunk into its final dreamless slumber.....

The Lady Inez had passed from life to death, apparently in a dream. Her countenance betrayed not an emotion of pain or suffering. Her arms encircled her husband's neck. It was his cry that announced to those who stood around the bed that the pulsation of her dear, sensitive heart, had at last ceased for ever.

Poor Harry Napier ! his grief was indeed bitter : to him it seemed a bereavement from every thought with which life held communion. His watchful relatives sought to draw him from the deathbed ;

but, finding that their purely intentioned motives exasperated his affection, they forbore for a time to intrude their solicitude upon him,—silently uniting in a prayer that He who had smitten would bind up the bruised heart!

CHAPTER X.

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DURING the week that followed the sad event related in the past chapter, Mr Wilmott had read with the grace of simplicity and reverence—in the church attached to the Vallis domain—the sublime burial-service of the Church over the mortal remains of the late Lady Inez Napier. The circumstances attached to this burial rendered it more than usually solemn and affecting. Deeply did those beautiful and pathetic passages of this service sink to the hearts of the mourners. Who hears not the voice of the Deity at such a time? Who looks not back on the irrevocable past, and thinks with awe—with a mind for a short period untrammelled by the prejudices of human error—on the lesson taught,—on the mighty, the illimitable future?

Again the sorrows and disappointments of life,—those sad facts which require no argument to support them,—were vividly presented to the kin-

dred heart ; and there are emotions attached to them at a time like the present which are too highly wrought to subside with their exciting cause.

Sir Henry Napier's trial had been indeed a sore one : it would be painful to portray the deep and crushing character of his grief. Until within a few hours of the last moment he had not left the chamber. He would not realize the fact that Inez had departed. Those who were not affectionately familiar with his countenance, would not have recognised in the worn and sorrow-stricken man the once gay, light-hearted being he had been. Every endearing tie, at this hour, seemed to be torn from him. Solitude was his sole relief. Sympathy could not yet gain access to his reason. For hours he absented himself from home-friends : and when his brother, in his earnest and touching zeal, sought for him in his seclusion, he could only grasp Charles's hand, and, when he strove to speak to him, a convulsive sob rendered the expression incoherent. Still that noble-hearted brother's presence, in the course of time, became the messenger of comfort to Henry Napier's soul. When he was by him, he was more calm and composed ; and, as Charles perceived that his judicious and affectionate regard was obtaining a partial victory over the despair of him



he loved so truly, he experienced a happiness which he would have before thought to be far remote from him at such a period.....

And now a stern imperative duty devolved on this high-minded, warm-affectioned, unselfish brother. He had still to clear his brother's name from infamy: the honour of his house was still to be upheld. It was a delicate subject. Many lengthened interviews resulted between him and Major Curran. Wilton was yet abroad. Armstrong was at hand. Human justice must be appealed to. It would be unworthy of their position, their principles, and their name, to shun an investigation, painful howsoever it might be.

When Sir Henry Napier could be brought to reflect on so important a subject, the peculiar and distressing position in which he was placed caused him a deep struggle between fortitude and feeling. But when he had somewhat recovered the first great shock, and his emotion had subsided, and he had once and again repeated the sad impression which beset him,—“that there were consequences arising from his great error which he had no power to retrieve,” his brother thought himself justified in showing him, that it would be countenancing Wilton's misdeeds to remain silent in regard to

them ; and that it would be a weakness for which they would have to repent, if they were discouraged from acting rightly and justly through the fear of shame and self-annoyance.

" If we linger now," said Charles Napier, and with reason, " our opportunity will be lost : that evil-hearted man will circulate things injurious to your honour, and, from appearing to connive at his infamy, through fear of a disclosure which affects ourselves, we shall assuredly lay ourselves open to persecution, and be stripped—through some fresh scheme, to which our moral weakness would give effect—of the honour and honesty which now support our cause."

His brother gravely assented to his opinions, and said :—

" Charles, my honour is in your hands, and partially cleared of the blight which has settled on it ;—for *her* sake and *yours*, let it stand pure amongst you !" and he withdrew from the council.

This point gained, more experienced heads were added to a grave consultation, and the result was, that Charles Napier and Major Curran, with Armstrong in company, posted immediately for London, and sought an interview with the highest authorities. Charles Napier's tale was listened to with

earnest curiosity and interest by the important personage to whom he consigned his brother's honour. As a matter of form only the depositions of Armstrong were taken, and then a warrant was issued to apprehend Louis Wilton to answer the charge of murder.

Thus Charles Napier's best hopes were fulfilled. In acting with energy and honour, he had done wisely and well. Secrecy would have generated trouble. In matters of moment, to *think* right is a negative good, unless we have the sense and courage to *discharge* a duty boldly. Charles Napier did not flinch from the task in hand : he returned immediately to Vallis, and steps were taken to execute the stern mandate with which he was empowered. Farmer Willis, the faithful friend and protector of Sir Henry Napier during his assumed character of Pearson, was constable over the Vallis district ; and the sturdy yeoman received the warrant " to apprehend the person of Louis Wilton " with stern satisfaction. He devoted himself solely to his task, and passed several days in fruitless attempts to learn Wilton's hiding-place. But Wilton was not far from the neighbourhood. It was solely a common accident of chance that detained him some days a few miles beyond Farmer Willis's ken. As far as

his own liberty was concerned, he seemed to consider himself quite safe. He had received intelligence of Armstrong from Naples (written purposely to entrap him), and therefore, without the slightest apprehension of personal inconvenience, he was spending a short period of his time with a friend in the vicinity,—perhaps to allow the singularity of William Neville's absence from S—— to blow over, before he returned to his old quarters.

The decided course which William Neville had taken was received by Wilton in no very placid manner. He saw he had been overreached,—that he must plot afresh, and he did so; and the first work of his art was to address a letter to Colonel Neville, telling him that he had traced out his son's hiding-place,—that he was yet in England, and would be captured at once, if the terms which he had to propose were not acceded to. This letter was returned to him unopened, re-directed by a hand, the writing of which caused the usually iron-nerved schemer no small perturbation. That same night he returned to S——. He had not heard the rumour which was gradually spreading, relative to the arrivals at Vallis House, or he would have reflected a little before he presented himself at Mowbray on the following morning, and demanded an

interview with Colonel Neville. Fearing that the excitement, which must attend an interview with their visiter, would be injurious to her father (though her health was but partially restored), Ellen Neville resolved to supply his place, which she did with a dignity and calmness of manner he did not like. The old false tale and professions were repeated; and when he noticed the silent scorn with which his words were received, threats came of betrayal of secrets which would steep the family name of Neville in irredeemable disgrace.

Ellen heard him out, and calmly. When he had finished, she said:—

“Perhaps I should treat your threats with silence; but as I know from past experience that you are strong in your will to do evil, I had better tell you that your authority here has at last been overthrown. Justice will shortly arrogate to itself a claim upon you; it may linger to-day, but ere many days have passed it will present itself before you arrayed in an authority at which the man of guilt trembles.” And then she left him to his reflections.

Before Wilton moved from the spot at which he had been standing, a servant entered the room, and placed a note in his hands. He tore it open, and

read : " Louis, your character is known to me. I am stricken with horror and alarm,—disgrace and sorrow are my inheritance, and derived through you. I remain here solely to succour those whom you persecute ; but heed my words ; fly from this neighbourhood, from this country : if you neglect my warning, I dread the consequences of the morrow." A bitter sneer crossed his cold, stern face as he read these lines ; then taking a pencil from his pocket-book, he answered :—

" It is true, then, that I have nurtured a viper : you sting me at a happy moment. Traitor to kindred and to gratitude, you are too pitiful for my scorn,—take what I have written to your heart," and desiring the servant to give the scrap he handed to him to the person who had sent the note, he stalked from the house in bitter, sullen pride. However, he did not return to S——, but directed his man, who had accompanied him, to proceed to his quarters, and bring him some articles which he required to a village he mentioned, situated a short distance from Mowbray. Two days after Wilton's visit to Mowbray, Ellen Neville wandered forth into the park, influenced by a vague presentiment that she might meet *her brother*. She could not, on reflection, bring herself to believe

that he had really left the country ; she thought he must be still in the neighbourhood. Could she see him and tell him of the unexpected turn events had taken, she should save him much anxiety and trouble. She had still hopes of her brother's reformation. She thought he must perceive that his misery had come out of his errors ; and knowing how her father's heart yearned to see him restored to his home, her feelings on this topic were encouraged by a confidence she had never been allowed to cultivate till now. Without an intention of proceeding to any definite point, Ellen had rambled on ; and as the afternoon was fine, she seemed regardless of distance, though she lacked something of her former strength. It was singular, it would seem she had obeyed an invisible guide ; for without motive as to the point to which she should proceed on leaving Mowbray, she found herself at last by the arbour at Roland's cliff, where she had so often met her brother. She entered the scene of many a bitter hour ; and seating herself on a bench, released her bonnet strings, and drew her scarf from her neck and shoulders. After a while, she gazed pensively around her, and her eye rested on a group of lilies, from which she had supplied Inez Navier's taste, as poor Inez loved

those delicate flowers shaded with their tint of melancholy, and tears came into Ellen's eyes as she thought of these things ; but they were not the *first* that had fallen to the memory of that gentle being. And then the thought obtruded, the heart that loves can understand it well, that caused her to question the position her family held now in the estimation of friends at Vallis. Would not the old connexion be entirely severed ? It would. She felt that the very name of Neville would be a reminder of woe and misery. For the first time for a long period she summoned courage to question her heart of Charles. For a little while a warm flush lighted up her pale cheek, but it was gone again : the conclusion was, " Our paths are separate ; " and her breath was burdened with a sigh,—the sense of it was known to her too well.

Suddenly, Ellen was roused from her sad reverie by a noise at hand. She had partly risen from her seat, when the shadow of a man's form on the wall proclaimed the close proximity of an intruder. Could it be her brother who had watched her enter ? She was much excited, and gazed with eagerness towards the door, which was pushed open now. Alas ! poor Ellen's hopes were sadly crushed ; for



the resolute countenance of Wilton met her view. With a piercing scream she sank back upon her seat as he drew near to her with flashing eye :—

“Now, Miss Neville,” he said in a cool, determined tone, “we must have a little chat together here in this secluded spot. I hope to make myself better understood than in the library of Mowbray, where you are inclined to queen it over me. Now you shall listen, and subscribe to my terms.”

“Never, never!” cried Ellen in wild affright, for beyond the door she saw the sullen countenance of some other ruffian, who must have accompanied Wilton, and now stood guard. “You may take my life,—mercy is unknown to you; but as I have said, I still repeat I will hold no terms with you.”

“Ha! do you still dare me?” said Wilton, drawing near the agitated girl with a fierce basilisk light in his flashing eye; “what! do you venture, here in my power as you are, on so lofty a tone? Listen to me, Miss Neville, mine you shall be, or die. I have sworn it, and I will keep my vow; but before I put my purpose in execution, you must sign this document,” and he spread a closely written sheet upon the table by which Ellen leaned. “This,” he continued, touching the paper, “you must sign here of your own free will; it is a statement of

your brother's relative to a secret in your possession, and your signature to it is essential to our safety, if things go against us. Comply, and you are safe from violence ; refuse, and I have those at hand who will bear you hence ; and though the hue and cry be raised throughout the country, I can defy detection. Ellen Neville, I am playing for a desperate stake, and I am desperate. I demand this of you,—refuse me at your peril."

Ellen's eye fell upon the sheet ; she was more collected now. She saw the purport of the document : it exonerated Wilton, by William Neville's confession, from participation in the deed disclosed. This signed by Ellen, Wilton thought, with Armstrong's aid he should be safe ; but no doubt his principal object was to intimidate Ellen to commit herself in this, that his old influence might be regained ; but the scheme was unworthy Wilton's tact. And had he known that Henry Napier lived, that he was within two miles of him, and that Charles was upon his trail, instead of losing time in plans—to the errors of which he was blinded through his passions—he would have placed the seas between them ; for Charles Napier's perseverance, and unflinching nerve, were his chief objects of fear.

Ellen gazed upon the paper ; and when she could not longer delay a reply, she said :—

“ Did I commit so great a sin, it would not avail you now ; the victim of your treachery and violence has escaped your machinations,—he is restored to the home from which he was banished through your evil schemes. Sir Henry Napier is at Vallis House, and your name is already attached to a warrant of apprehension. Even now, the officers of justice are on your trail : your fate is sealed.”

For a minute Wilton seemed staggered by this unexpected information. However, he quickly rallied, and cried, jeeringly :—

“ A well-worked up idea, truly : a pretty tale to frighten fools ; but if true, the more necessity for despatch. I’ll have the start, and by heaven, Ellen Neville, I will keep my word. It is out of the power of man to frustrate my well-formed plans ;” and he laid his hand on Ellen’s arm ; but she quickly disengaged herself, and retreated to the wall, uttering a scream of fear in such thrilling notes that it must have been heard far away.

“ Come here, Miller, and assist me,” cried Wilton, evidently addressing himself to the man on guard, without turning his head.

"I can't," was the reply, accompanied by a bitter oath; "my hands are full."

Wilton partially turned now, and was infuriated on seeing a female desperately struggling in the arms of the man to whom he had spoken, and who was evidently striving with a noble heroism to escape from him to the succour of her on whom Wilton had such cruel designs.

"Don't you see I have more than I can manage?" observed the man, catching Wilton's eye, as the person to whom I have alluded almost escaped from his hold.

"What, beaten by a girl?" answered Wilton, sneeringly. "Stop that screaming fool, or we shall have some of the Mowbray or Vallis hinds upon us."

The evil-hearted speaker was infuriated by the opposition he had met with. He cared for nothing now, and his tool partook of his dark passion. Seizing the struggling female by the throat, he pressed it fiercely,—a stifled wail was heard as that cruel grasp was taken off, and she who had exercised her feeble strength with such courage and devotion, sank crushed upon the ground within the arbour. Alas! the face was sadly distorted, and blood was flowing from her lips.

Ellen Neville had covered her eyes, and her frame shook violently during the short period the unnatural struggle was going on ; and as she tremblingly withdrew her hands, and saw its terrible termination, she cried, springing towards her poor friend :—

“ Monsters, you have murdered her ! ”

Wilton received her in his arms with the laugh of a demon. Ellen fainted : from the sudden relaxation of the muscles, the insensible form escaped from his hold ; he stooped to raise it from the ground, when a thundering exclamation burst upon his ear, and he was dashed without sense or motion to the floor.

We must return for a few minutes to follow up Napier's steps. He had urged Farmer Willis forward in his task, and had, when the former seemed foiled, taken upon himself a portion of the stern duty, the capture of Wilton. For some days he too was at fault. Chance rather than design, on the part of Wilton, proved that the evil and cruel are sometimes more fortunate than they should be. But this afternoon Napier had received a message from Farmer Willis that the discarded valet, Miller, had been that day prowling about Roland's cliff : that he had dogged his steps, and witnessed an in-

terview between him and a person he recognised to be Wilton's servant. Willis therefore surmised, that, as the tools were there, the workman was not far distant, particularly as these men hung still about the outskirts of the Park of Mowbray, and within view of the mansion. On receiving this intelligence, Napier ordered his fleetest horse to be saddled, and without apprizing any one of his intentions, directed his course to the spot mentioned by the farmer. He found Willis riding along a copse, inspecting, it appeared, the progress of some workmen who were clearing the brushwood. This copse was the boundary of the Vallis estate to the east, running to the foot of Roland's cliff, on the Vallis side; the summer-house, which was often Ellen Neville's resort, being erected at the bottom of the hill, edging the copse and cliff on the Mowbray side. Napier discussed the subject of Willis's message, and he learnt in addition, that the latter had perceived Miss Neville cross Mowbray Park, in the direction of Roland's. Napier's heart throbbed painfully on hearing that Ellen was so near him. They had not yet met,—a long interval had passed since he had last seen her. Sorrow and affliction had been since there. How would they meet now? His warm breast encouraged

hopes for a moment, but they sank before a sickly fear, and suddenly the whole current of his thoughts changed, as a wild shrill scream floated on the breeze from beyond the copse to the left. Napier sprang high in his stirrups,—his gaze was bent with a concentrated energy of his whole soul, as he cried, pointing onward with his hand :—

“ Willis, what can that cry mean ? ”

“ My life on ’t,” shouted the farmer, springing into his saddle ; “ that comes from the dell by Roland’s, there away to the left.” And as he spoke, another cry burst upon their ears, more intense, more piercing, if could be, than the former.

For a minute’s space, Napier was horror-stricken by that sound, his countenance was deadly pale, and then the quick blood rushed so wildly to the brow and cheek, that the violence of emotion well-nigh overpowered him. He was more than bewildered,—the long-tortured nerves almost snapped,—he had had little rest or ease for days. Nature suffered from the wear and tear of such anxiety ; but the wild gush of feeling subsided, he was himself again ; cool, daring, and resolved. Turning to the farmer, who was impatient, and thinking, he afterwards said, that the young master had lost his

nerve, Napier cried, in a voice that startled Willis from his heavy thoughts:—

“Willis, follow me with a fiery spur,—ride as though my life depended on your speed,—we have no time to spare.”

And the speaker's heavy whip fell with stinging severity on his horse's quarters. The high-mettled animal reared as if he would fall over, and then dashed away with the speed of a whirlwind. A wide and rapid stream, with broken and irregular banks, was directly in Napier's path. Unheeding the farmer's cry to ride for the ford, again the whip fell, and with a snort of fury the trained hunter cleared the formidable leap, and breasted the steep ascent with the fleetness of the antelope. Another despairing shriek smote upon that furious horseman's ear. With recklessness, bordering on madness, he urged the noble animal he bestrode to increased exertion, and he seemed to fly, so infuriated was he, through the desperate energy of his resolute rider: he shot over the brow of Roland's, and bore down, like a falcon in its swoop, upon the spot whence his daring guide surmised the cry had issued. The heavy palings which bound the spot around the harbour were crushed by the gallant horse's chest. The pace was too furious for leap-



ing them, and the rider was thrown violently to the earth ; but a kind providence protected him ; he was unhurt, and on his legs in an instant. His old false servant seeing his resolute master by, turned and fled as Napier crossed the threshold of the harbour.

The sight which met his eye,—Wilton attempting to raise Ellen from the ground,—quite maddened him. With the speed of light he seized a rough implement for gardening purposes, at hand ; the weapon arose, and then descended with terrible force, and as we have seen, Wilton sank, crushed and senseless. Napier now stood literally stupified. The ground reeled and rocked under him, and things swam before his eyes like to the sensation when we are subject to partial faintness. The thought could not compass the reality. He felt as a man who suddenly finds himself, when swimming, drawn into a whirlpool. Before he knew what he was doing, he had knelt by Ellen's side, and called upon her name in anguish. Then, as the crushed and suffering form of *her*, whom it will be concluded was Ellen's untiring friend, met his gaze, he uttered her name with a voice of wondering horror ; but evidently without the power yet to comprehend the nature of so terrible a spectacle. His voice, so fearful in its pathos, restored Ellen's

faculties to a partial glimmering of light. And the stranger, though too weak it seemed to raise herself, must have felt a quickening of the spirit of life from *that voice*, for her eyes opened, and for an instant a smile flitted over that poor face. Almost mechanically, Napier bore these two afflicted beings from out that dread room.....

"Thus to meet," were Napier's first words, as he supported Ellen's drooping form,—"*and thus*," turning a bewildered gaze upon Ellen's friend, who reclined against the bank, "Mademoiselle D'Albani—Livia! great God, how much you have suffered too!"

"I have preserved *her*," said the latter, with a pathos and sensibility in the voice that found its way triumphant in spite of her great physical weakness. "My duty is done. You have both been cruelly smitten; but I shall die happy if I have saved you for happiness."

Ellen's reason was restored, though it wandered still in the labyrinth of wonder.

"Who are you?—And you know *him*?" she cried, drawing the suffering form to her bosom,—  
"What motive prompted you to come to me in the time of such dark affliction, and to walk as an angel of light by me?—In mercy, explain this mystery."

Livia D'Albani's eye rested an instant on Napier's troubled countenance. The woman that loves is quick to seize a clue. She possesses a faculty which enables her to guess, divine as by intuition, the private thoughts of another's heart. And thus it was that Ellen read much, as she saw the expression which flitted a moment round her poor friend's lip, as she turned her gaze on Napier.

Ellen *knew* the secret, though Livia thought hers one which no eye could see. In the midst of such horror, explanation could not be satisfactorily rendered. Still Livia D'Albani could not resist the promptings of her pure heart to perform at once the duty she had prescribed to herself; and feeling, too, that Ellen, if not alarmed, was, at least, surprised, she took Napier's hand in hers, and placing Ellen's in it, said faintly, and with a slight shudder, as she looked wistfully into Ellen's face,—“ Let there be confidence between you, I pray of you in charity. If not, I shall be deprived of the purest ambition woman's heart conceives.”—And then she added, after a short pause, addressing her words to Napier, “ And now I relinquish my charge into your hands.” She sank back, quite faint and exhausted. The sunshine was gone from her world. She had voluntarily plucked the flower of her heart away.

And as Ellen gazed upon the ashy palor of that cheek, her gentle nature yielded itself up to a tender impulse, and over Napier's hand, which still clasped hers, she wept as though her heart would break.

Napier could endure no more. He paced the ground in an agitated, excited manner. He strove to think. At length, as his eye fell on that sweet, frail being, who had done so much for him ; her position rushed upon him with bitter force. She must be at once removed. It was his first rational idea. It would increase her torture to behold that dark spirit, to whom she seemed so inexplicably bound, borne away a criminal, bound and branded as the worst of malefactors. He, therefore, turned to Willis, who stood with folded arms at the doorway, and said, " Willis, these ladies must be removed immediately. This is no place for them. Ride, promptly, to Mowbray, and bring assistance—a carriage."

" It is not necessary," answered the farmer ; " Colonel Neville is close at hand ; I met him in his pony-phaeton, in the upper-drive, as I crossed it. He asked me who the horseman was who had ridden so recklessly over Roland's. I told him ; and he turned to follow me here."

" I regret this !—I regret it much !" remarked

Napier,—“ I would not meet Colonel Neville at such a time for worlds——”

“ Why do you regret my coming here, Charles ?” said Colonel Neville, advancing, with a troubled mien, through the paling which lay strewn about, and moving with difficulty,—“ Now that one dark dread has disappeared, I had hoped to meet you with our old good feeling, for I have ever felt a true friend’s interest in you.” Poor Colonel Neville, he had forgotten much—or he would have felt that a glimmering of a baleful trouble had been shown to him, in which Napier was still desperately implicated. His remark to Napier was spoken in a way that touched him deeply. He made a step forward, and taking Colonel Neville’s hand, he led him to the arbour, and pointing to Wilton, who was evincing signs of consciousness, he said, very gravely :—

“ There, Colonel, is my answer !—That man of evil is in my power !—The persecutor of the lost Inez. The self-intentioned murderer of my brother. Thrice the foiled assassin in my own person. Such are his deeds—and worse !—And now the law !”

Napier was interrupted by a hand that drew his from Colonel Neville’s arm ; and, as he turned, the poor afflicted Livia sank upon her knees, and cried,

in deep agony, " You will not !—You cannot !—Remember your pledge to Mademoiselle D'Aigrigny. You swore to befriend me, in my dire necessity, for your life, which I preserved. Forget not, how sacred such promises should be ! Charles Napier, would you tarnish your honour ? I have prayed for you—for your happiness. I have devoted my life to shield you from woe. I have watched for you by the couch of her you love ; and have been happy, in that I have protected that for you which will make happiness complete. I believed you noble, just, and merciful. Then, do not bid me feel that you are otherwise. Spare *him*—spare *him*—at my intercession ! Look not so pityingly on me. Feeling is of a different tenor than you conclude. I feel I am going to the presence of an Almighty Judge ; and my prayer to you, for mercy on him, is holy. I love that man ; but my love is not of the sympathies you surmise—he is *my brother* ! "

Napier's hand, which had shrouded his eyes from the afflicted being before him, was withdrawn, and he bent an astonished gaze on the kneeling suppliant, saying, in a voice of deep emotion,—

" Oh ! that you had been more candid, poor girl ! I do, indeed, pity you ! Alas ! your prayer cannot be assented to."

Napier would have moved away, but she clung to him, still grasping his hand with frenzied fervour, crying, "Heed my prayer; you must assent to it. A week, a day, an hour, give him—for liberty—for me. On these knees, I implore you—I solicit the deep boon in repayment for the life I preserved for you. Listen! listen, as you hope for mercy!—It is my dying prayer: Spare, spare, *my brother!*"

Napier struggled long with his emotions; but, at length, pity for the being who knelt before him, entreating a brother's life, gained the mastery. All thoughts of personal injury, of outraged family honour, faded away before that meek, upturned face. He turned to Farmer Willis, and said to him, "Let your prisoner rise!"—And then said to Wilton:

"For your sister's sake, I am willing to forget all else. I will not be the means to consign you to a felon's doom. Go, and sin no more, lest you fall into the power of those who will let no feelings of pity encroach on the rights of justice.

Livia D'Albani had but strength enough left to sob out a fervent ejaculation of "Thanks—thanks!—You have saved him!"—when she fainted away. She was borne in Napier's arms to the carriage, that stood a short distance from the spot, without even a

feeble sense to comprehend the burden of the sigh which escaped from the breast of him who would have sacrificed aught but his brother's honour to have given her comfort.

As Napier returned from his sad task, he found Ellen Neville supporting her father, who leant heavily upon her shoulder. Livia D'Albani's voice, her eye, its pleading, upturned gaze to Napier's face, took that old man back to early years. He had never noticed Livia, at Mowbray, to be other than she wished to appear—his daughter's watchful nurse. But now, from the energy of that effort of love, that the sensibilities had been called into play, she at once stood before him the prototype of *her* who had, for a fleeting season, held his heart in bondage. The child of her who had sworn to be revenged upon him for his desertion. No wonder that he was distracted. No wonder that a fell, dark dread again assumed vitality in his breast.

Napier perceived Colonel Neville's agitation, and though, with Ellen before him, his own nerve was trembling, he drew near, and said to the old man :

“ My kind and constant friend, to tell all I feel now would be impossible. To meet you thus is an affliction, deep enough to mock the future ills of fate ;



and, combined with the piteous scene we have witnessed, sufficient to topple reason from its seat. Need I say," pointing to the carriage which contained poor Livia's stricken form, "take her to Mowbray. You," looking up into Ellen's face,— "will extend to her a sister's care." And then Napier added, taking his old friend's hand, "For ourselves, dear Colonel, the onward prospect is still dark. You are aware of the nature of my errand to Paris—the burden of my search. You know the result of my labours; but you do not know what I have had to surmount—to endure. More than once, my life has been in jeopardy, through the machinations of this man who has just quitted us. But, Colonel, I fear that the name of one, near and dear to you, will still be implicated. The thought is most distressing to me; and if the harsh decree of fate raises a stern barrier between us (and his eye was fixed so despairingly on Ellen, that hers sank beneath the wail of the spirit that spake through it), oh, remember that, as I owe the success of a stern duty to the Providence which rewards the good and smites the evil heart, you, knowing the justice of my cause, and the feelings which have guided me, will entertain no unkind thought of me, but regard the bar which is perhaps to be placed upon

our further intercourse, as the sad result of events beyond my authority to influence."

Colonel Neville sighed deeply, as Napier spoke to him ; and, after a short period, he roused himself sufficiently to say,—

" Charles, I understand you well !—But, alas, I cannot raise my mind above personal considerations. There are things arising out of, and connected with, our mutual troubles, with which you are, as yet, unacquainted, but which bind my faculties in iron bonds. Until this hour, I had thought the worst had passed ; but the words which we have heard, the suffering we have witnessed, cause my brain to reel again, and the authority to reflect has again become insensible and inert."

Colonel Neville's thoughts had evidently gone back into the old turbid channel. He cast his eye upon the spot where Wilton had been standing, and, shuddering, said, " I forgive *him*, though he has done me much evil ; and, in *his* dire necessity, may he feel contrition and remorse." Then, raising his hand to his eyes, as if to conceal the burning drops which filled them, he added, " I cannot obtain a clear perception of my own feelings ; I feel like a man suddenly struck down in the van of battle, who cannot raise himself to see the horrors

which boom with cruel force upon his ear. Come, my child," he continued, to Ellen, "you are bound to your old father's pains and sorrows ; God grant your pure heart break not under their stern pressure."

They were gone ; Ellen's lips had moved as she left Napier's side, but no word issued from them ; and he stood, for a time, as a man to whom some sudden intelligence had been conveyed, which struck at happiness in the very centre of its being, and left its hope quite bare and wasted.

It was, however, fated that a sudden stop should be put to Wilton's career, even if Napier's perhaps mistaken mercy afforded him fresh opportunities for effecting evil. A few hours after the scene we have described, a horse galloped wildly, and without a rider, into the town of S——. It was recognised to be Wilton's, and the affrighted people, who went out to search for the rider, found him lying senseless, and nearly on the point of death, in a ravine over the roadside. The common rumour ran, that he had been hurled from his horse through some sudden bound on the part of the latter ; but those who were acquainted with Wilton's dauntless courage and firm zeal, shook their

heads mysteriously. It was whispered too, that a man, whom many recognised as Armstrong, had been seen on the road during the course of the afternoon; and the conclusion was sought to be drawn, that a struggle had taken place between the two, in which the tool had at length taken bitter and enduring vengeance on his old master.

Be this as it may, Wilton was borne to S——, and carried to the hotel. Within a few hours after the fearful news had reached the Countess D'Albani, who flew to the hotel, where she found our good friend, Dr Powell, busily engaged with the wounded man.

"Is there no hope," cried the Countess, clutching Dr Powell's arm with frantic force. "Speak! Can you restore him to one hour of reason?"

"He who has smitten can alone heal," answered Dr Powell, gravely and sadly, with his arms folded across his chest, contemplating the lunatic with an earnest gaze. "At present I can give no hope. After our remedies have been applied, we shall see if there are grounds for entertaining it. A week—"

"A week! What, can he live an hour? Ha! I must away to bring the proud lord of Mowbray to him."

"Hear me," said Dr Powell, quickly drawing

that fiery and vindictive spirit, now so terribly roused, away from the crowd ; " I will devote myself to your son. I will watch over him with care ; every means shall be resorted to, to help him. His present sufferings may plead for him ; his life may be spared ; therefore dismiss this unnatural yearning for revenge. I will do all you wish, all I promise ; and, should the worst be at hand, then *he* will be near you."

"Or I near *him*, to hiss the truth into *his* daughter's ear, to mouth it in the servants' hall, and brand on his brow his infamy." This dark spirit's hate must have been a fearful burden. How potent evil becomes when the heart is stripped of charity and honour.

The mother watched over her son, and stood by him. She displayed a deep and fearless devotion,—a devotion of a character to touch most strongly the mind of one like Dr Powell, who knew how terribly this first fruit of a guilty connexion led her to cast off nearly all human restraints, and, through a sense of wrong done her, stained her child's mind with thoughts of vengeance on his own parent, concealing wickedly the fact of that close affinity from him. But now by the side of evil, how exalted a virtue ! By the side of danger, how heroic a mien ! Though

wicked unto crime, almost above human weakness, who shall judge? If, in her youth she wedded her soul to guilt, she preserved one poor affection from its stain, and its light may guide her on the way to good. Some days passed, but still the fearful and gasping moan filled the room, and told of pain and writhing torture. Death, 'twas affirmed, would be a blessing; and he, "the strange and solemn alchymist," was not far off. He was coming in kindness now, to take that worm from out the mind, and place it in the perishable clay. He was at hand. For a short while the mind was once more intelligent. The mother was leaning over him. In the dark eye, so sunk and wild, there was now an exulting gleam as the door of that dread chamber opened, and a venerable, sorrow-stricken man, leaning on a friendly shoulder, became a witness of the closing scene. There was a silence for more than a minute's space, when *his* presence was discerned. Then that female rose up, and, with a fierce gesture, drew that old man forward, and said sternly,—"*Thy child*;" but at the moment these words fell, her fury and her desire for vengeance died. She sank upon the bed, and there, forgetting it would seem her purposed resolution, she faintly murmured those *two words* which she had used be-

fore, but in another cadence now ; and from the agony depicted in the tortured face, 'twas evident that some pure authority—till now marred into a curse by crime—found sympathetic commune with her soul, for the next moment her face was pale as death ; and then her attitude evinced that her thought was on the confines of a prayer. Oh, nature, how wonderful, how inscrutable are thy instincts ! A moment's struggle more, and then the chain of evil snapped. A feeble hand was stretched forth. *The father* sank upon his knees beside *his child* ; he called him by his name,—by that name which the tie between them warranted ; and that voice met a first, a last response. And then he moved away the fingers which were clasped before the sufferer's sight. Alas ! he gazed upon the lineaments of a corpse.

CHAPTER XI.

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WILLIAM Neville had fled to Palermo. He had heard much of the beauty of Sicily, of the freedom of Sicilian life, and conceived that in that capital he might find a safe asylum. It was soon enforced upon his mind, that though he could escape from his enemies, from even human laws, it was beyond his power to escape from the dark consciousness of crime. The work of moral retribution had commenced,—there was a visiting of bygone deeds within,—each deed had been limned upon the conscience, and time drew forth light shades to darker tints, until they appeared blood-red phantoms to the soul. The mirror of the mind was dark, and one harrowing thought made his nerve weak, and turned his manhood faint. He was truly miserable,—a lonely friendless man, unable to dispel the gathering mists which memory called up to cloud the little light that was left.



At first he wandered about Palermo in a moody, dejected state, suspicious of every one, and trembling in fear that he might hear, from some passing stranger, the accusation upon which his mind brooded. Nights passed in fevered restlessness, a scorn of life, a dread of death, a distaste for society, yet a horror of loneliness,—such was it with him. Terror glided, like a serpent hissing as it went, through the marrow of his being. He would rail at the work of others, accuse them of his misfortunes, to find a loophole to exculpate himself, unconscious perhaps, that he thus pointed afresh the sense of self-degradation, and thus he sought to excuse himself; that false pride of the erring heart, which gains authority with the age of natural qualities, wrongly directed, seeks from out the treachery of others a palliation for our own backsliding. The small cares and vexations of life; the falseness of those whom we have trusted; the withering away of that pure faith and confidence we have placed in our fellow-man, cause no sorrows nor pangs that are beyond relief, whilst the mind rests secure on the foundation of conscious rectitude and honour; but when things are otherwise, a light matter irritates the selfish spirit, selfishness still exaggerates the wrong, and out of its very meanness seeks the

companionship of the sycophant and traitor, deeming it possible to find true metal in forged coin.

When William Neville fled from S——, he had resolved to eschew gambling. For a time he adhered to his resolution ; but when the mind is weak and vacillating, the conduct is almost sure to be so likewise. He had not been a week in Palermo before his purpose wavered. He fell in with an old acquaintance, and was tempted to accompany him to the gambling-table. When there, as before, the fever seized him,—the desire of play again became necessity. At first his fortune did not diminish his stock of ready money ; nay, it rather increased it. Thus was he lured, till, as formerly, gambling became a passion. He stood again beneath the upas tree, and inhaled its poison. No man more engrossed,—no man more constant,—no man felt that baleful sympathy more omnipotent than he,—the alien and the branded. It would be revolting to follow, step by step, the fight he waged with fortune. One hour on the verge of madness from an unlucky cast ; the next, the wild emotion to be suppressed, from an unlooked-for turn. But at last he was left to the terrors of poverty. Destitution, in such a sense, had never visited him till now ; but now the proud man was compelled to witness the

difference of conduct towards the successful and the unsuccessful gambler. He was treated with scant courtesy by his few associates,—or, perchance, he caught suspicious glances on him, which angered his pride, but left him powerless to resent,—for he owed debts and had not the means of placing himself within the pale of honour. He moved about unconsciously, as it were, as a man in a dream, but haunted in spirit by a cruel host of evils of his own creation. I have said he was left to the terrors of poverty. The hotel-keeper was to be paid. He summoned nerve to apply to an acquaintance (one who had shared the liberal table of a generous host, for Neville was generous to error with a full purse, or when he had means) for a small loan. The latter “was very sorry; he was really about to ask the same favour of his good friend.” The Jews required vouchers of future prospects before they would part with their coveted gold, and so he remained penniless. He was compelled to quit his hotel; and it must have been very mortifying to the pampered man of fashion to be branded with the name of swindler. He would have fled from Palermo, but he had not means to accomplish this wish; he therefore retired to an obscure lodging, to wait a reply to a letter which he had addressed to Dr

Powell. No answer came, or he was impatient. Now his landlord required money : he was a poor man. Without payment in advance, he could not procure his lodger the common necessities of life. Neville's jewels had fed the craving to redeem his loss at play, and they were gone ; but his watch—the once-prized gift of his dead parent—was still a blessing, for it was sold, and the proceeds gave shelter and maintenance to the vagrant son.

Maddened by fancied injuries, and still more, perhaps, through wounded pride, he again had recourse to the bottle to annihilate reflection. But this did not last long. The struggle was too bitter. No strength of constitution could stand the surges of passion and despair blending with the fire of intoxication.

His position at last became intolerable : he lay stretched upon his couch by fever, and the blood flowed in his veins like molten lead. The raving man became a sore burden in his lone lodging. The hand was niggard that ministered to his wants. There was no one by to prepare the cooling draught, —to slake his burning thirst,—to bathe the fevered brow,—all was desolation around that meagre

couch, of which its tenant was now unconscious.....

At length a gentlewoman came, and wept by his couch in sorrow. There was a something almost terrible in the fervour of her deep attachment. It is in a time of suffering and adversity that the pure light of the woman-heart shines forth triumphant. She spoke to him in tones of former days, and with a prompt, untiring zeal, devoted time and sensibility to him. That sick-room was to her her life, her world; beyond it, even the bright Sicilian sky was sunless.....

The suffering man revived. It had been Fanny's hand that had laved his brow,—the scorned, deserted, and betrayed, had slaked the fever-thirst of him she loved, and for his sake had watched, and prayed, and wept, and still prayed on.....

The suffering man revived; and though he felt the generous, gracious boon,—the prolongation of his life,—he would rather have died during his unconsciousness, than have met that intent, that anxious gaze. He turned away with a groan of agony; and when she knelt beside his couch, and conjured him to be calm,—that his life depended

on her prayer,—she loved him still in sorrow as in prosperity,—would be his servant,—slave,—watch over him for ever, if he would live, and let her do so too,—he started, and cried convulsively, as his hand clutched his haggard brow :—

“Do not approach me, Fanny ; do not come near me. What ! are you ignorant of the shame, the misery, and guilt, which burden my existence?—that I must ever be a lonely, miserable man, with the brand of murderer on my brow ? I will not dissemble now, Fanny,—flee hence ; this is no place for thee,—flee hence. What ! has not Wilton told the hellish secret ? No, no ! thou shalt not be sacrificed ! Villain I am, and have been ; still thou, poor fluttering heart, shalt not perish, through the excess of this woman-weakness. Linger not here !” he still wildly cried, starting up in his couch and pointing to the door. “Fly hence, and tell them at Vallis House that thou hast witnessed Harry Napier’s wrongs fearfully avenged !” He sank back quite overcome, his face buried in the pillow, as if, even in his benighted state, remorse had made his soul sensitive, and dispelled much of his selfish pride.

When his first words fell on Fanny’s ear, she was

desperately alarmed. She hid her eyes in fear; and, as the terrible self-accusation boomed upon her, she instinctively recoiled; but, as it was followed by an allusion to Vallis House, and afterwards so pointedly to Henry Napier, a flood of light filled her sweet face as she bent timidly over him, and whispered,—

“Still you may be happy; and whilst life lasts, the past, though it appears so terrible and cruel, may find its grave in future well-doing!”

The sufferer only partially understood these words of comfort. He slightly raised his head, and said, with bitter impetuosity:—

“Smite me not by words of comfort. My hope is dead! Blood,—blood shed by my own hand, stands between hope and me!” and again the light of day was as darkness to his vision.

Fanny took his hand and drew it to her, and then cried in a deeply earnest voice:—

“Place God between you and your hopes, and all will yet be well. Hear me; there is no reason for the fear which that dark deed inspires. Sir Henry Napier lives,—he is restored to his friends!”

She could say no more: it was well that insensibility stole over him, or the overpowering joy

which such intelligence would have occasioned, would have been too mighty in its influence over his weak intellect and tottering reason.

At this juncture Dr Powell entered the room, and, taking Fanny away, told her it was now necessary that their patient should be left entirely to his care. Some few days passed : there was a hard struggle between life and death ; but William Neville eventually rallied. Dr Powell's attention had been great ; and the good physician's skill and kindness met with a rich reward. He had now hopes of making another whom he loved happy. It was a rich reward to him. Charity was a pure passion with him, and it exercised an ennobling influence. No explanations had been made. The feeble man for a time was far too prostrate to endure excitement ; but when he was able to collect his faculties, it was evident that he retained a slight impression of something of vital moment having occurred. Almost the first rational words which were spoken by William Neville turned to this :—

“ I have been on the point of death,” he said ;  
“ I have had strange dreams. I have gone all over the terrible past, and have lived, too, in the future. Strange sounds have smote upon my ear,—strange



visions have flitted before my eyes. Your presence, too,—What means all this? Can such a wretch as I am have aught in store which could produce comfort? No, no; *those words* were unreal,—their promise a phantasy.”

And now it was that Dr Powell feelingly and faithfully sketched the facts relative to Sir Henry Napier, and, of which Neville was ignorant, assuring the astonished and trembling man that there was no longer any reason for the terrible dread which he had entertained; and he further said:—

“There has been no delusion: words of kindness have fallen on your partially clouded reason, and I trust they are consecrated there. A comforter has been near you during these sad days,—Fanny has nursed you through your alarming illness. She has forgotten, in your adversity, the evil which you did her in your prosperity; but I have removed her hence until I am in possession of your true feelings.”

William Neville was another man now. One evil deed had rendered him indifferent to sin. He had been hurled into vice—into sudden crime—by circumstances, by a weak compliance to the will of another; and now that he saw that the consequences of evil acts were not so distracting and

irredeemable as he had been compelled to believe, there is no question but that his repentance at this moment was sincere, and that he was earnest in his desire to make retribution. His cruelty to Fanny, and his conduct in this instance, arose, without question, from a profligate and inordinate appetite; still his existence had not been an uninterrupted scene of selfishness. During the time he prosecuted this piece of villany, there was a dread from which he could not escape, pressing on his tortured imagination. He sought excitement because reflection was a horror, and he gave himself up to the behests of lawless passion,—augmented through fits of intoxication,—to hide from his own eyes the ghastliness of that mental disease which, in spite of his natural defects of character, he could not think of without shuddering.....

More than one lengthened interview took place between Dr Powell and his patient. The latter craved the union, which Fanny's heart had the courage to hope for, with a nervous joy. "It is a vast experiment, dear Fanny," said Dr Powell with much anxiety of mind, as he brought this prayer of William Neville's before her consideration. "Will you stand unshaken by irritating circumstances? Will you have the prudence to

bring common sense to unite with the affection which animates you? Can you truly pledge yourself to honour and obey one whose character,—in fine," Dr Powell added quickly, as he saw Fanny was hurt as the word fell which reflected on him she loved,—“will you take upon yourself the vast responsibility of strengthening and confirming his present desire to retrieve the errors of the past?”

“I will pray to God to be a true wife to him,” said Fanny, with deep fervour and sensibility; “and I will labour diligently in my duty, that my affection for him may extend rather than contract the influence which I now possess.”

Dr Powell took both her hands in his, and remarked with deep feeling: “And may you always find God by you in your labour; and may He crown your pure ambition with His protecting love! Forgive a deception which has been practised, Fanny; until now it was necessary. Mr Pearson, or rather Sir Henry Napier, never deceived you. You are already the lawful wife of him you love, and have been so during these months that you have mourned over your misfortunes. Come, this assurance has had a rare effect; why, the soul of summer is in your face; I never saw so fragrant a blossom there before. You cannot go to

him at a happier moment—there is your prison,” pointing to William Neville’s room: “penitence is there, dear Fanny, and therefore promise of happy days.”

\* \* \* \*

But now to account for Fanny’s and Dr Powell’s appearance at Palermo. I have already intimated that William Neville had written to Dr Powell, informing him of his deplorable position. The worthy doctor felt relief on learning Neville’s abode, as the family at Mowbray were labouring under severe apprehension and dismay concerning him. Dr Powell proceeded at once to Mowbray with his news. Fanny had been an inmate there from the time of Ellen Neville’s severe illness. Her sensitive and retiring demeanour had won much kind consideration from all who became familiar with her troubles, and the melancholy of her young heart created a lively interest to a mind so acutely tuned to the emotions of sympathy like Dr Powell’s. He knew the nature of her position, of her sufferings; he knew she was void of any social reproach; in fact he had been throughout in Major Curran’s confidence, and was therefore aware that, from information received, together with instructions given] him from Mr Pearson, he was able,

under the *nom de guerre* of Langton, to frustrate Neville's intended treachery in reference to Fanny. Fanny had been deceived in reference to Pearson's appearance at Gretna. We have seen that she asserted to Lady Napier that she was certain, after the marriage ceremony had been gone over, that Pearson had assured her of her safety ; but this was not the case,—it was Langton who had stood by her ; but he had so closely imitated Pearson's voice, that her error was not at all unnatural. After having put matters in a proper train, it is not to be wondered at that Pearson remained in the background. Although his disguise proved to be impenetrable, it was possible that through accident, or at an unguarded moment, in a matter of so much difficulty, he might betray himself, and thus expose himself to great humiliation, if not actual danger.

On Fanny's return to Vallis, deserted by him on whom she had bestowed her happiness, Major Curran would have opened William Neville's eyes to the extent of his engagement (and Pearson had intimated his wishes that it should be so), but subsequent grave suspicions, which circumstances every day strengthened, relative to William Neville's connexion with the strange disappearance of Henry Napier, ren-

dered Major Curran's desire to protect the much injured Fanny abortive. Whilst such serious fears were potent in regard to William Neville, it would have been false service to have cleared up a proceeding that, in the common course of events, would have stood Fanny in great stead in her own and in the world's opinion. In fact, Major Curran considered that a suppression of facts relative to Fanny's connexion with William Neville was a charity.

Dr Powell had advocated Major Curran's views, and Fanny profited largely by his unswerving attention and kindness. Now that William Neville stood acquitted in regard to those baleful suspicions which had been attached to him, and as the connexion, by being proved, would not sentence Fanny to infamy and disgrace, Dr Powell resolved to test, to the full extent of its authority, the affection which had existed; and if, as he believed, William Neville's love to be to her the haven of her hopes, he would bring things round in accordance with his own strict sense of right and justice. Consequently, Fanny was the first person at Mowbray who was made conscious of William Neville's sad plight at Palermo. Dr Powell, though rich in sympathy and delicacy, was an old bachelor after all; he was very speedily perplexed

with his position. The influence of love was little known to him ; his own sober and steady feelings could not at all understand the emotion which he was compelled to witness. He had said no more than that " he was sorry to tell her that William Neville was placed in a painful position in a foreign land, suffering, and in want." He did not say, " Her husband was thus situated," but glancing beyond her soft, sweet face, turned pleadingly to him, had simply said what I have set down.

He was at once called on to witness the devotion of the woman-heart, and its pure unselfish attachment. She said, shuddering, and with tears, that she would fly to him, and labour with tenderness to save him from despair, and to wean him from his sorrows. At this declaration, Dr Powell was at fault ; he became conscious how superficial his knowledge of the woman-heart was. He expected interest to be evinced, and tears mingled, perhaps, with upbraiding words ; nay, he thought he might have to plead a bad cause, to paint a bad man's claim, in generous zeal to strive to mitigate the severity of his cruelty. But what was he called on to hear ? Dr Powell could do nothing with Fanny ; he was compelled to seek out Miss Neville. Ellen was sitting by poor Livia


D'Albani's couch,—the succoured had now turned comforter and nurse. Ellen knew not until now the position of affairs in reference to her brother and Fanny; when it was delicately revealed, she kissed her sister-in-law with deep tenderness, and shortly subscribed to Dr Powell's wishes. Her brother's true feelings were to be probed before Fanny's peace was further trifled with. But they could not restrain Fanny; she had made up her mind to go to him,—it was all she thought about: and after some expostulation, Ellen assented to her wishes. How should Fanny be escorted? This was Ellen's concern, and a secret consciousness of his vast sympathy caused her to turn her eye on Dr Powell. He was noticing her with interest, and, divining her meaning, said: "I cannot withstand this heart-eloquence; do with me as you wish: it would be the act of a colder nature than mine to refuse you anything." From this moment it was understood that Dr Powell accompanied Fanny.

Hasty preparations were made,—they reached Palermo, relieved William Neville from his sad state, and the faithful heart of that much-injured girl was at last rewarded through his recovery. At this moment, the evil spirit, which had been so active, lost its authority over William Neville, and his



better nature was stirring in his heart. His suffering and his trials broke down the pride of the bad, worldly heart. He awoke, as from a terrible trance, from thoughts of overwhelming guiltiness, and saw that darkness had passed by, and that a gleam of sunshine had reached the spot where tempest and hurricane had been. From a dull, leaden despair, he awoke to a still fair inheritance. The train of thought which came on with the return of reason, who shall say? Who can scrutinize those emotions when he realized the fact that he had not imbrued his hands in blood. Happy he whom distress and adversity have taught wisdom. No garden, however rank from weeds, is incapable of improvement or of culture. William Neville could have said, that however much unhappiness an evil member of a family occasions to his friends, the guilty heart accumulated upon itself yet greater misery than it could bring upon others. But of these things he spoke not. Who shall depict his feelings? He could never be what he had been. The most settled mind cannot hold a sure fence against the evils of the morrow,—but an altered man he was now. Hours would pass, and his head would be bent upon his chest, and busy must have been the thoughts within; but none became ac-

quainted with the nature of them. His health had evidently suffered a rude shock, and his were sorrows, unless attended with repentance, which do not ennoble the mind. Fanny, with delicate consideration, devoted much of her time to him, not sufficiently marked to be significant of a fear of his morbid state increasing in importance; and if she did effectually succeed in banishing his gloom, one might judge, from the increasing animation which came over his manner in her presence, that those clear eyes which were fixed so often on him, glistening in their honest love, would gradually become a rare resource, and that all they told him would be eventually received and treasured with an earnest and endearing sympathy. Dr Powell (like an earnest friend) was munificent in good advice, and as he left them to their quiet retreat some few miles from the capital, he felt that those most interested in their well-doing could now look forward in expectation of seeing that Fanny's influence, together with William Neville's evident contrition, would exercise an authority of sterling importance over his future welfare.



CHAPTER XII.

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LOOKING backward on the events which I have recorded in this tale, we see that, in the midst of wealth and temporal prosperity, happiness flew away so far, that there seemed no likelihood of its returning again. And why? May we not assert, because selfishness obscured honour, because evil lurked under the garb of liberality, and from not being uprooted, grew into a habit, and because ability turned in defiance of the authority whence it received its light. Thus did these difficulties and embarrassments arise. In a temporal view, those family catastrophes, which suspend or dissolve its happiness, arise from some time having been ill spent: from some kindred error having been weakly resisted: from non-atonement of error before it turns into a curse, or from the head of the household having been careless to apply the proper

remedies at the moment when they would have been effective.

It was arranged that the brothers should leave Vallis for a time, and repair to Charles Napier's Burford property, to superintend some improvements which its owner had determined to effect on his estates. Major Curran was to join them at no distant day, and thus it was hoped that the object of so much real solicitude would be gradually weaned from morbid and melancholy reflection. The day prior to the departure of the brothers for Burford, the Napier family were surprised at Sir Henry expressing a wish to visit Colonel Neville. They did not, however, oppose his wishes, though they felt the interview would be attended with much pain to each. They knew nothing yet (nor did Sir Henry know), of the connexion which had existed between Wilton and the owner of Mowbray. This painful fact had been suppressed. Still, had it been made known, they would have felt, on reflection (however much they were shocked and horrified at the disclosure), that the Nevilles merited their true consideration and sympathy. Sir Henry and Colonel Neville met: the latter had experienced a second attack of paralysis,—the use of his left side was gone. He was wheeled about in an

easy chair from room to room, a sad wreck of what he had been. At first his visiter did not know him,—a circumstance which was evidently registered with a sigh in the heart of the poor invalid. The distressing subject was at last brought forward by Colonel Neville. Sir Henry spoke with true consideration for the feelings of his old friend. Still, the father hung with a profound sorrow over the cup of earthly bitterness which he had been compelled to drink. He spoke of William Neville's first crime, shuddering:—

“He forged my name,” he said; “and in this matter your father committed himself to shield us from infamy. He did kindly, but he did not do rightly. Had he told you all, what may you not have been spared! From the silence which your father preserved on this grievous matter, he participated in the evil, and lost the privilege of performing an imperative duty.”

And then the old man spoke of early error in reference to himself, but vaguely, and much of the matter of his self-reproach was strange to his visiter. Still, his argument proved how bitterly he repented the loss of years, and honour filched from him by the false god of ambition and of the world.

Two months were passed by the brothers at

Burford, but the change proved of no material benefit to Sir Henry; therefore, Dr Powell immediately suggested a lengthened tour during the ensuing winter, and he signified a wish to accompany his friends. At first Sir Henry opposed this scheme, but Charles overruled his disinclination to leave Vallis, and preparations were made to carry out the purpose in view. It is a very difficult thing to find a companion, a suitable companion, for a man in Sir Henry Napier's frame of mind. Few feel that genuine interest in the welfare of another (however close ties may have been), which by strenuous application of enduring and judicious kindness endeavours to overcome the torments of nervousness, that most bitter and afflictive malady. But Charles Napier was one of the few in this world who felt unselfishly generous. He was quite in love with his brother's happiness, and he would not rest until he could sun himself in its smile. He was one of the few who was even more in reality than he was in profession. Health and sensibility seemed showered on this noble-hearted fellow, to protect and cheer the sorrowing; and he again set about his task with a courage and resolution which quite went for sternness with those who did not perfectly understand him. Of his

own concerns he seemed not to think. If he could wean his brother from melancholy reflection, and call up a transient smile to his pale, sorrow-stricken countenance, the comfort thus bestowed was reflected back upon him with a force which proved that this labour of real charity had its own peculiar happiness. His brother's trials belonged to him; they were of him, and with him. In sentiment, these brothers were as children again, trusting and confiding. The softness of childhood-confidence returned, and its grace hung upon the lip, and in the eye. The connexion was truly tender and intimate, —the offspring of kindred affection in its high estate, —a manly interest grafted on the stock of the purest instincts which influence the passions of the soul.

Soon after the departure of her sons, Lady Napier began to question herself relative to the course she should pursue towards Ellen Neville and her old friend the colonel; or rather, how she could approach Ellen, who shrank from an intercourse with her Vallis friends with that nervous sensitiveness natural to one of her delicate, high-toned mind. Months had elapsed since Wilton's apprehension, and his awful end. Lady Napier now hoped that the acuteness of Ellen's feelings had subsided, particularly as Charles was now far removed from her,

—who had, even in the hour of parting, denied himself the happiness of assuring her, by look or word, how closely the memory of former passages of affection and sympathy was bound up with the future hopes of his life. For this forbearance Charles Napier would have been richly rewarded had he known the heartfelt gratitude of this true and noble-minded girl. Bold as she had been in adversity, now that the demand upon her courage had no more of such fearful necessity attached to it, she shrank back into the timorous and sensitive woman, with a simplicity which is the inseparable companion of genuine grace and true modesty.

Lady Napier was most anxious to offer her sympathy to this poor trembling girl, of whose nervous state she was now fully cognizant. It needed not that she should question herself of the propriety of the step she had resolved on taking. She did not think wrongly. Her thoughts were the dictates of virtue,—her emotions rendering a free unrestrained obedience to them. She drew from her desk, at a time when Mary and her mother were discussing the course to be pursued on this subject of mutual interest, a letter she had received from Ellen, and it was again perused. Although this letter had



been answered on its receipt, and in a manner to dispel, if possible, the sorrow that weighed upon poor Ellen's spirits, Lady Napier felt that she had omitted much of the argument she should have advanced, and she decided on a further attempt to comfort and persuade.

Ellen responded to the warm desire of her kind friend. Her heart was inspired by too grateful a sense of kindness to heed form or time. That afternoon she crossed the threshold of Vallis House, and from the tender welcome she received, experienced a return of emotion which had been for a long time a stranger to her. In a short period there was an unreserved intercourse between their guest and the female members of the Vallis family, and earnest inquiries were made concerning Colonel Neville's state of health.

"Reason has been mercifully spared him," answered the anxious daughter; "his mind has indeed recovered somewhat its former tone, but the body is sadly shattered. You will find him, dear Lady Napier, much altered; so feeble, yet so resigned,—he never murmurs now." Lady Napier's next inquiries were for Fanny, and Ellen's face brightened.

"She is my father's greatest comfort," she said.

" Her letters are a vast source of relief and satisfaction. She has displayed in her delicate position a peculiar devotedness and constancy which is beyond all praise. And thus she has sweetened *that* cup of affliction. William, too, has written more than once." Ellen spoke timidly now. " And even you," she was going to say, but she checked herself, and supplied the word with " even an indifferent person would believe, from the tenor of his letters, that his mind has undergone a radical change. He has resolved on emigration to New Zealand. He has written very sensibly to my father on the subject. ' He has decided,' he says, ' that he will never expose his children to the temptations which overcame him, and ultimately thrust him forth from his legitimate place in society, the gibe and scorn of honest men.' There is indeed something of honourable ambition," continued Ellen, with calm seriousness, " in the principle which guides him. True, these indications of so desirable a change in my brother's feelings must appear to you vague, if not chimerical. Still, you will grant, dear Lady Napier, that we have a strong instance of the sincerity of his views, in the fact, that he entreats my father to allow him to resign his rights as elder son, and to be supplied with

merely a sufficiency to avoid being cramped in the execution of his scheme."

"He means good, then," said Lady Napier, gravely; "and may good prove to be the result of his present will; but what does your poor father say to all this?"

"At first," answered Ellen, "he shuddered at the thought, at what would be, he concluded, an eternal parting. 'So far! so far!' was ever on his lips; and then the prejudices attached to wealth and name exercised some authority, but not long. At last he said:—'A father's judgment should be elevated above the shallow prejudices of fashion. I will not err now: prudence, not selfishness shall guide me. His wishes are laudable, and I will encourage them. We owe something to society. William, your thoughts are in a right direction. Seek and you will find that which you have lost. May the good of the future atone for the evil of the past; then will God pardon you, and mankind receive some compensation at your hands.' Such were my father's words," continued Ellen, with feeling; "and in reference to William's request to abandon his legitimate rights in favour of my brother, my father's decision was, that he would seem to comply with his wishes.

“ ‘When reflection has sobered his judgment on these points,’ he said, ‘it will be better for him to regard labour as a necessity rather than a choice, or in trial, he would perhaps fall off from the principle that should strengthen him in prudence. He shall be taught to look upon his scheme as a responsible duty. Then, if he does not fully complete his design, he will at least advance it so far that the work will have done him good; and, even should he wholly fail, his time will have been spent profitably to himself.’ ”

“So far, so good!” said Lady Napier, thoughtfully; “but, my love, it seems unjust to punish the rising generation for the errors of the passing one. Should there be children, a son born to them—”

“He will inherit his father’s rights intact; he will be Mowbray’s heir,” interrupted Ellen; and then her eyes sank, and a light flush suffused her countenance as she added: “At my father’s death, the estates of Mowbray are to be placed under trust, I think he calls it; and I have heard him say, that he has written to two friends, on whom he felt he could implicitly rely, to entreat their acceptance of the charge, and to undertake the sole guardianship of my brother’s child.” Ellen now suddenly paused.

"You mean," questioned Lady Napier, earnestly.

"Your sons," replied Ellen, scarcely above a whisper.

"A noble privilege," answered Lady Napier, with something more in her face than a flush of matronly pride; "and if I know my boys aright, they will repay this touching mark of confidence with the most strenuous zeal."

There was a silence for some minutes. At last Lady Napier observed, with a cheerful countenance not divested of concern,—

"There is still one to consult, whose feelings are of vast importance, and merit deep consideration—Fanny. What are her thoughts? Does she coincide in her husband's views? How does she think about his scheme?"

"As a good wife should, as a wife must who *feels* her duty, and considers her husband's happiness and interests paramount to every earthly consideration."

Major Curran, with Mary by his side, at this moment entered the room, and then, the first time for many a long day, a light, happy smile beamed in Ellen Neville's countenance.

CHAPTER XIII.

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WHEN something more than a year had passed, the calm of Vallis House was intruded on once more; but by happy tidings now,—“the brothers” were about to return to their old home.

Time had operated beneficially. When wisely employed there is no sorrow, however great, but it will soften, if not subdue. The remedies are slow, yet they gain something every day; and holy are their indirect instructions. No mind, even in its severest trials, need be alone. There is a hand, which, when sought with reverence and confidence, is ready to lead us to a place of security when the tempest rages and our frail barque is anchored in an open roadstead. Prosperity is not allowed us for enjoyment only, nor is affliction meant to be an irredeemable calamity. We should learn that simple task “dependence,” get it by heart, guard it by faith, and then with trial will come fortitude,

which, to use an eastern metaphor, "is like the towers of a strong city, not only an ornament but a defence." Never, in a time of adversity, had human beings striven with more patient perseverance for resignation than the inmates of Vallis. Their earnest labour was now crowned with success: they had tested its virtues: they now enjoyed the reward of well-doing. This day there was a something beneath the anxiety and eagerness depicted in Lady Napier's countenance,—a chastened expression of delight, which intimated that she had been made familiar with some fact, which raised the drooping head of sorrow to the sunlight of pure happiness. The mother had received happy news: she still held a letter in her hand, and it was from her younger son. His own warm heart was in it; he spoke in touching terms of the happiness of a reunion. His brother was restored to health; his mind was less disturbed, and he looked forward, with even a feeling of anxiety, to the assumption of those duties at Vallis, which were incumbent on his position, but from which he had been so long estranged.

Preparations to receive "the brothers" with flattering attention went speedily forward; the heart was in the labour, and it performed its task gracefully. No public demonstration of delight was

for a moment entertained, but everything that could afford interest and pleasure to the new comers, met with important supervision and arrangement. Nor was the fond mother inclined to cede to her daughter's tasteful imagination a liberty to exercise its skill, which she said would only embarrass her own plans.

The full tide of an August evening was over the valley. Without and around that retired and tranquil spot, the aspect of things invited the serious mind's full confidence. Within the walls of Vallis, the gay song of youth, and light-hearted mirth, were not heard; but in their place was that calm delight, that sedate and speaking smile, which says, "the heart that strives to do well to-day, may look with confidence for happiness on the morrow." Yes! happiness had crossed the threshold of Vallis once more—happiness in its middle age, endowed with a rare intelligence through the schooling of experience. There was nothing dark or hidden now in the home principle, no viper in its nest, no barbed shaft to pierce the spot from which the proof armour of honesty and integrity had been removed.

The evening-tide was waning, and more than one anxious eye was bent upon the carriage-way. Major



Curran had drawn his young wife to his side ; his nervous arm hung lightly over her fair shoulder ; and, as she whispered, " My brothers with us—our happiness will be complete !"—he pressed her softly to his heart, and the glance of mutual trust and confidence proclaimed their wedded joy. At this moment, a travelling-carriage was seen rapidly approaching, and Lady Napier stood forth, with open arms, ready to receive her sons. The meeting came ; and it was an affecting one. Feeling could not be expected to wear a very sober uniform just then. Mary clung to her younger brother's arm, and as they stood a moment for the grateful mother and Sir Henry to precede them to the hall, Charles gazed down into his dear sister's face, and as he pressed a congratulatory kiss upon her brow, his eye followed hers to the noble form of his dear friend and kinsman ; and then the brother's smile of warm affection on him was the young wife's guerdon. Mary's happiness *was* complete.

The Napier family are, then, happily united ; they are under the old roof-tree, supported by a kinsman's noble heart, who had walked with them through difficulty and danger, and had returned, with an unflagging zeal for their welfare, much real good

for the evil which had been done him ; and thus he secured the richest of all earthly blessings to himself.

The Napier family was together, and under the old roof-tree. The father's error had been bitterly visited on each individual member ; and one pure gentle heart had sunk away from the circle : still this family had struggled bravely. Inspired by the manly resolution of the younger brother, they were preserved from the intolerable suffering which minds less strongly fortified experience at bitter kindred affliction.....

Had Charles Napier forgotten his old friends at Mowbray ? Did morbid feeling still magnify to Ellen's mind the distance between him and herself ? Of course, Charles made particular inquiries concerning the colonel's state of health, but seemed dissatisfied when his questions were literally replied to. His anxiety did not continue long unsatisfied ; for Mary had some fair flower, the curious *strelitzia*, to show him in the conservatory ; but they were hardly there, before the kind, sympathizing sister looked up tenderly into her dear brother's face and said, " Can I satisfy you, Charles ? Have you nourished the old hope during your long absence ? Come, you must be candid with me : I am Mary

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to you still, and for ever, though an old married woman now !”

He kissed his sister's fair cheek, and answered, with a smile,—“ And very charming, I must say, for an ‘ old married woman.’ Why, you have not got over the old blush of bashfulness yet : like a sunbeam amongst your treasures here—pointing to the rare flowers around them—it lights and warms.”

“ Come! come! this will never do, dear Charles,” cried Mary, blushing deeply, even at his compliment. “ You must not flatter ; you are as naughty as Walter !” and then she quickly added,—“ Is he not looking well ?”

“ Well !” answered Charles Napier, with animation,—“ I believe you, love !—and he looks, as he deserves, thoroughly happy. Take care of him, Mary, and for my sake too, for, next to Harry, I love him best of all mankind.”

“ And what of *her*, dear Mary ?—Tell me ; you guessed the burden of my hope before troubles sentenced it to silence.—Is *she* well ?—And do you think I may now venture to approach *her* ?” Charles Napier's companion seemed in no way astonished at the question, but answered, with a sweet gravity : “ She is well in health, Charles, though still troubled

in mind. She gives me her utter confidence on all subjects but one—that of interest to you. You will understand that I could not obtrude an allusion on this point; for I should not deserve her friendship did I wound her sensibilities; but I do not think you have cause to despair.”.....

In Charles Napier's mind, however, for the rest of the evening, there sat brooding a formless disagreeable emotion. We have seen he had forborne to press upon Ellen's notice that long-tried and fervent love which had so long animated him, fearing that time was not ripe. Though trial and a harsh experience had robbed him somewhat of the poetry of his early life, he was still a bit of an enthusiast. He had thought for others for a long while; and, now there was no further claim on his active exertions, he commenced thinking for himself. Although the day's excitement had fatigued the members of Vallis household, and the Napier family retired for the night somewhat early, in it there was an exception: Charles did not heed rest. He went forth into the vale, with an intention, perhaps, to endeavour, by a stroll through scenes which were a source of such lively interest, to dispel, in some measure, the uneasiness and agitation with which his mind was encumbered. There was one

friend, however, in the household conscious of his movements, and had resolved to obtrude upon his privacy,—this was Mr Wilmott, the good, the noble, the unselfish man! He had been fast and true to Napier: the wise, the thoughtful voice in his prosperity; the bold, courageous champion and adviser in adversity.

During Charles Napier's lengthened absence from Vallis, Mr Wilmott had been his constant correspondent, and the interview between these two firm friends, in the walks of the Vallis domain on that calm, still night, was deeply interesting to both. Napier had much to ask—much to say. It was evident that the purport of his queries was to see if, during his absence, any unforeseen calamities had arisen, which would be likely to have increased the distance which had seemed, from an unexplained, yet tacit understanding, to separate the families of Mowbray and Vallis. Mr Wilmott's information on this head was satisfactory. After Wilton's death, the Countess D'Albani had been removed, with marked respect, to her own friends in Italy. Her mind had been rudely shaken; her former fierce courage had disappeared. It was said, that she had attempted, prior to her removal, to sacrifice her existence; to put herself out of the reach of

the mental torment she endured ; but, since her sojourn in her own land, the authority of kindred care had exercised a salutary effect. Such was the latest news. Armstrong, it seemed, had tired of an inactive life, and as his irregular tastes, *openly* exhibited, shocked the good people of S—, and as he drew on himself a mixture of indignation and disdain, he resolved on leaving the country. This, Mr Wilmott said, he should not have explained, but to recount a most singular anecdote, of which he had been informed, in connexion with Armstrong and Mr Whittaker. “ You know, Napier,” said Mr Wilmott, “ that, amongst other information, I told you, that the hypocritical lawyer had had his name struck off the rolls ; and, since this, knowing that he possessed the unbounded confidence of his clique at S—, he considerably extended a kind of private banking business he had in hand ; and so infatuated were numbers of that community in his favour, that they deposited their all in his hands, for which they were to receive an annuity. When he had thus collected, report says, not less than £60,000, he intimated by note, after the absence of a day or two, to the good people of S—, that ‘ Virtue had found its own reward : he had been visited by ‘ a call,’ in the night-sea-

son, to some far-distant land, where he was to administer to the spiritual wants of a savage, uncivilized people; and that he hoped to be assisted, in his labour of love, by their prayers. Such was his lot in this short state of trial, and he embraced it with complacency, seeing that the period of difficulty would be transient, and meant to fit him for eternal and unspeakable happiness.' This remarkable farewell caused an extraordinary sensation, of course, at S——, and men knew not how to act—save one—this man was Armstrong. His knowledge of the worst part of mankind, and his experience of their ways, enabled him to form a shrewd guess as to the kind 'of call' Mr Whittaker had received; and he hied off to the port of Bristol; and, exercising his nautical tact, actually discovered the ex-man of law in possession of a cabin on board a steamer which was to sail that day for America. What literally transpired is not known: in substance it seems, that Armstrong wrung the whole of the plunder from the man, and ascertaining from him the names of the parties whom he had swindled, he fairly returned the principal to them, and explained in a laconic note: 'That the residue of Lawyer Whittaker's purse seemed to be *bonâ fide* his own property, consequently he had entered into

partnership with him ; and that, in the city of New York, they had agreed to establish the business of wine-brokers, under the firm of Armstrong and Whittaker ; on consideration (the writer came to the opinion), that the president of the Teetotal Club of S—— would prove an excellent *taster* of the juice of the grape. And he solicited his *friends* to be under no apprehension of his *junior partner* being one too many for him ; for, in right of his privilege as head of the firm, he retained their funds in his own hands.' And, as a guarantee of this fact, he remitted an amount to his own family, which places them in comfort. Not a month since," pursued Mr Wilmott, " I heard that it had been ascertained that the firm in question was in actual existence in New York, and that it was doing a thriving business."

" Well," remarked Napier with a smile, " I hardly anticipated a something, almost like a poetical judgment, to fall upon the cunning lawyer from such a source. On my word, Armstrong has done good. A strange connexion ; the presence of each must serve as an ever-present reminder of the past, and render the same a source of punishment, from which they cannot escape." And now a more



personal and pleasing conversation followed, for Mr Wilmott's penetration had divined the cause of his friend's uneasiness; and his remarks were so judicious and well timed, that when they had returned to the house, Napier felt his mental disquiet greatly abated.

The following morning, "the brothers" were long closeted together; and a few hours afterwards our friend Charles crossed the brow of Roland's cliff, and the Mowbray domain stretched out beneath him. Close at hand stood the summer-house, the spot where he had captured Wilton. There he had last seen Ellen, now quite a year and a-half since, yet vividly did that dread hour return to his memory. He gazed upon a neglected scene; the once cultivated nook wore a desolate aspect,—the banks around were of tangled weeds, and overgrown thorns and briars amongst the well-remembered plants and roses,—sure evidence of small care and interest. Charles Napier could not resist the impulse to stand once more within the circle of that dark scene, and as he moved through that small room, and gazed upon the mildewed wall, he felt a chill steal over him. He left the place with a sigh, and sat down upon the bank beyond,—the very spot on which he had placed poor Livia D'Albani when he bore her

senseless form from the place at hand. His lip quivered as he muttered : " No wonder the memory of *that* hour should call up so palpable a sorrow. Poor Livia ! bright flower ; like the rose in yonder bed of thorns, thine was a hapless destiny. And thou art gone ! How deeply affecting was Mr Wilmott's tale ! After that bad man's death, she sunk away," he says, " like a snow-wreath exposed to a night-shower. But I will dissever memory of you, Livia, from memory of your bad brother. No thought but that of gentleness can fill my mind as it dwells on your matchless excellence. Your interest in my welfare shall be an amulet about my heart to preserve the faith and honour which I owe through you to womanhood."

He rose from his seat ; slowly, sadly, he moved away. He had gone some distance before he felt his spirits return, and even then he turned and gave one long, earnest look backward, as if to answer by that speechless sympathy to that soul commune, to which idea too had been attached. Napier was roused from his reverie by a sight of the mansion of Mowbray. Who has loved and knows not the thrill which is experienced as the eye dwells on the habitation that holds the dear object of its solicitude ? He gazed upon the weather-stained walls with an in-

tentness which seemed to say that he expected them to respond to the sentiment which overflowed his soul. He could not have been satisfied; his eye wandered away to look for sympathy elsewhere, for some *feeling* object that would better understand his thoughts. Ha! why that start? Why should you pause, Charles? Why turn so pale, and then so flushed? What is there in the landscape to cause your pulses to bound, to fill your face with such a glow of manly sensibility? What, indeed! Shall we, good reader, draw *him* aside, and let you see the object which rendered a pleasing scene a thousand times more interesting? Suppose then, you allow your imaginative eye to range a little distance on, and to pass the stately avenue of oaks and herds of deer as things of small note, and peer still to the margin of the lake, and then you will observe a female figure wending its way by it slowly. You would see that form turn round and look towards the house with an eye of melancholy and thoughtfulness; and you may really fancy you could hear the sigh, as the onward course was then pursued. The features of that lady you could not discern; nevertheless, you would observe that there was a something about the figure, in that graceful step and attitude,


with which you should be familiar, and which should cause your heart to utter a hope that that pedestrian would return from her stroll far more happy than she seems.

Of course it is concluded that Ellen Neville was not far off. The forepart of the day had been spent as usual by her father's side, and now he had, in anxious consideration for her health, enjoined the necessity of exercise. Ellen had complied, more to satisfy her parent than to look for pleasure in the stroll. The fact was, Ellen was *not* happy. Her true heart had never faltered in its love for Napier; never in thought, through trial and difficulty, had her love wavered—its faithfulness was as unstained as the light of day.

Having reached a secluded spot, and taken a seat under a willow whose pendant branches of ripe foliage shielded her from observation, and through which the beams of the setting sun sported gleefully, she drew a letter from her bosom, and perused it with interest. It had that day reached her, and it was from Fanny. Already she had written from the New World. The once dreaded distance seemed much less, now this chain of communion had been opened. And the letter said, that all that distance had been passed over without one of the horrors

which had been predicted overtaking them. The voyage had been long, but they had usefully employed their time, and had still something to finish when they came to anchor. It was evident that Fanny was a happy wife. She wrote pleasantly and hopefully. Indeed a vein of ecstasy was apparent in the strain which dwelt on the beauty,—with a young mother's pride,—of her sweet boy,—of her hopes for him,—of the father's interest in his welfare. When this letter was finished, another was taken from its place of rest. This one was of a different character: it was old and crumpled: it appeared as if it had been often perused: some words were almost defaced; tears had done this, and tears still fell upon that sheet. Dear, sweet Livia! you were faithfully remembered, and an almost reverent wonder was with the reflection, that you on your deathbed could make so feeling, so forcible an appeal to your untiring friend in Napier's behalf. Noble, loving, unselfish heart,—your voice was now upon Ellen's soul. How profoundly touching that confession, that for *his* sake you had sought to preserve *her*! Poor Livia, she said not a word of the blight which had fallen upon her own affection; she sighed away her breath in a prayer for *their* united happiness.

With eyes cast down, Ellen sat in a dream-like abstracted mood. A sympathizing companion sought to rouse her from her reverie. A noble deer-hound, which seldom left her side, seemingly conscious that his mistress was unhappy, pressed closer to her, and gazed wistfully in her face. He had received a silent caress, when he suddenly turned, and springing forward with a cry of joyfulness, crouched at the feet of an intruder. That intruder must have been well known and loved, or the gallant dog would have displayed a very different demeanour. Ellen's glance was in a moment raised: she started, and attempted to rise, but could not: she was speechless. Napier was scarcely less agitated than the fair girl before him. Emotion, in its most painful excess, was at his heart,—he truly experienced the profound, the ecstatic, the torturing quality of true passion. Ellen was before him. How beautiful, how artless, that noble man's emotion! He saw *her* only,—she was his world. He gazed, and still that silence said more than human speech. At last words did come, but the burden of them was so acute and thrilling, that it seemed a sweet madness had overborne his reason. Ellen slowly revived. There was a soft gleam of unmistakable affection in her eye, which said, that mental struggle



at such a moment must be degenerate and fruitless. Had the burden of her emotion been less acute, she would perhaps have acted differently, but as it was, all power of resistance was crushed: love was triumphant now. Her face lost its pallid hue, —a flush of crimson was over it, as her head sank on Napier's bosom, and tears came to the relief of her wildly distracted sensibilities. How rare that delight, how exquisite, which thrilled to the core of Napier's warm heart, as he realized this instance of Ellen's affection for him! Then *he was* loved—loved by one whom he was not very wrong in thinking almost too pure, too unselfish, and too beautiful for this cold earth. Her place was in heaven, he thought, with all pure things, and lovely, with the mother of happiness and bliss. But then it cannot be supposed that this pure idea held its place long, for it was only the next moment that he had whispered,—“How very lovely life appeared, as it came in, and nestled by him now!” The circumstances of former estrangement and distress, the misery and dread through the long separation, contributed, by the force of contrast, to magnify the present joy a thousand-fold.

At last Ellen made a successful effort, and gently disengaged herself from that warm embrace. A gloom.


then gathered in her eye, and her lip quivered like a young child's in a sudden sorrow. Napier did not give her time to speak, but after breaking forth upon the bliss of meeting, spoke of the secret of his soul in all its pure ambition. Ellen did not attempt to withdraw her hand from his ; but she succeeded in checking his rapture, and in a voice, at first, of much sweet bashfulness, she said : " You have taken me by surprise ; our meeting should have been different ; I should have controlled my emotion ; I should not....." She did not finish the remark, but observed with greater steadiness : " You have asked, Charles, is it all real ? Can I truly love you ? and I answer, what my heart must within these few minutes have told you—that your affection has not been unrequited. But having said this, having indulged for a brief space in so dangerous a luxury as following the dictates of emotion, I must now tell you that we must part. Oh, listen to me, I implore you,—for Napier's manner alarmed her,—I do not think of myself,—I will be candid : let me reason with you ; let me speak to you as one who regards your happiness more, far more than her own. You know what has been, and yet you do not, Charles. I must tell you"—and her cheek was very pallid now—" of a terrible connexion



with *him* who wrought us all such misery. He was of my father's blood, Charles. Charles, how can I tell you this? Why do you not fly from me, scared, horrified? When I learned the fact, I thought I should never see the sun again. Oh! when I think of what might have been!"—She paused and wept: the idea was too intolerable to pursue. "You know enough," she resumed with a shudder. "Your judgment, in its cooler moments, must warn you of the trouble that is in store for us, if I now yield to the dictates of affection. I know you; from my childhood I have known you well. For me, you could endure innuendo, slight, calumny, misrepresentation, and do that which is so bitter for a man of honour to do. You would fight for me against a just prejudice of society. I know your unselfish, your manly nature—I have read it well, and at a time when the heart is prophetic in its judgment. I know that though your honourable pride should be wounded, you would not complain; that although the persecuting spirit of the malicious would bait you with its gibe, that you would struggle hard to rise superior to the injury it would nevertheless inflict on your untarnished reputation. Nay, if all these troubles were united, the consequence of a union with me would strengthen and fortify your

affection for me—this I believe ; but, Charles, I must not subject you to a life, during which your heart would have to war against the convictions of your mind.”

“ Pause, Ellen !—pause, I implore you !” interrupted Napier, with a glow of high resolve and pride upon his brow. “ And let me tell you, that I have long known of the connexion, to which you have alluded, with one who is now no more ; and memory of you has been as dear to me as life. Nay, if possible, this sad fact, for I have felt how acutely it must have affected you, has rendered a fulfilment of the bond, which has so long existed between us, a deep—a holy obligation. Oh, Ellen ! you, whose heart is so truly capable of every tender and generous sentiment, will do justice—full justice—and mete out reward to me for my sincerity and faithfulness. Your love—bright, pure, open, and confiding—will encourage my dream of happiness—stamp it with the signet of reality—and thus compensate me a thousand-fold for all my troubles. What ! have you thought that the mere outpourings of malignity and craftiness could influence my judgment, and render me a fugitive from my own self—a traitor to it ? Ellen ! I cannot escape from memory of what has been. No single moment, for



all this time of absence, has been unfaithful to you. No !—as God judges me, no !—And innocent and spotless as you are, what can harm you, beloved? In the simple consciousness of your virtues, there is a mental security—an element of happiness, yet unseen, which will add dignity to the riches of content. Between us and the evil-minded and malicious, a barrier would be raised, against which their shafts would strike harmlessly.

“ Ellen, you heed me,” he cried, gazing tenderly into her face. “ Let the eye of society follow us in our career, and be honest in its opinion ; and then, if there is anything amiss in our conduct ; if we are proud to our inferiors, and unmindful of our duties, its censure will teach us to amend. But, as we are situated at this present time, by bending to the self-conceived opinions it may take up, we strip the wreath, which Nature tenders to us, of the flowers that ornament it, and supply their place with briars gathered by our own hands.”


He still gazed upon her ; and, checking her reply, said, very impetuously, “ Pause, Ellen !—pause, ere you speak !—I cannot hear a word—I must not—that does not give promise of hope and happiness. Unwearied by time, constant through misery and separation, I have clung to my hope in you. Then,

*can* you say now, that the clouds *are* dispersed—that the sun shall shine no more? Oh, look not so!—Gaze not so despairingly upon me!—Cast all, but honour and nature, from your heart, and be bold enough to say—Love, to thee the victory!”

He saw Ellen’s glance turn, as it were, instinctively to Mowbray for a moment, as her woman-nature all but succumbed to his enthusiasm. He read her meaning.

“Ellen,” he cried again, “I will not remove you from the old home. You once said, and I honoured you for the sentiment, in your parent’s trouble your soul was there! There, during his affliction, it shall remain; but let me share the watch of love and duty with you. Then, beloved, there will be no joy I desire, no pleasure I would enjoy, that would not be communicated through your society to me; and I would hope be, too, beneficently diffused over our mutual lives.

“Ha!” he cried in ecstasy, “do I see the heart escaped from the tyranny of fear? Yes! yes!—I have regained my treasure; heart and life are come to me again. Oh, God, I thank thee! the term of my affliction has expired! We must never part more. You will sustain, encourage, bless me in my future, my own dear girl; and, in our mutual



happiness, we shall henceforth sun ourselves in the smile of heaven."

As he thus spoke enthusiastically, he gently drew the long sorely tried, still loving girl, towards him; and, as his last words sank into her soul, she hid, in his bosom, the expression of the almost overflowing tenderness of her heart.....

Charles Napier,—true brother, good son, and faithful friend,—you are rewarded for your honest perseverance in well-doing. You have a blessing by you, Napier. Ellen is very lovely, and she is ornamented with a loveliness apart from personal charms, — the loveliness of female excellence. You have a blessing by you,—honest men's esteem, —to adorn the outworks of the home, which is, when rightly estimated, the most permanent source of this earth's happiness to man. Napier, by your integrity you have won this,—a prize which the treasures of both the Indies could not purchase; and if you guard it now with tenderness and prudence, it will prove to be the advent on this earth of a blessing still,—a blessing at a time when good deeds are "the still small voice" which whispers words of comfort when the night of this life stands at the confines of eternal day.....

They left their pleasant seat to bend their steps to Mowbray. No stain rested on that path of love ; and worthy of an angel's smile is this world's walk in honour and fidelity. The sun was all but sinking from the view ; still it illumined the scene, and the happy fancy was, that it diffused a brighter glow,—that it rekindled its expiring beam, and stood motionless in its course, with a gleam of heavenly hope encircling its orb, reflected from that still *purser ray* which—we are not irreverent, we think—we trust will be an earthly guide unto that happy pair.

Napier accompanied his Ellen homeward : he could not trust his darling to tread one inch of ground without his guidance. The lark from his heathery couch rose joyfully: casting the dewdrops from his wings, he soared again through the ether of the boundless sky, blending their plighted troth in its pure flight with spirit-song, so sweet and clear, that at first they marvelled and gazed upward to that winged worshipper ; then love, and hope, and gratitude together fashioned thought, and, with its evening homage, they mingled a prayer of thankfulness.....

The hall was gained.....They stood beside the sufferer's couch. No word had passed : the filial

instinct led her on. She knew her father's hope and heart ; and they drew near him now,—the sweet daughter tremblingly, until the stricken man stretched forth his arms and held her to his bosom. They wept ; but the eye brightened quicker than of yore. There was no cause for heaviness of heart. Happiness shone for a fleeting time around that furrowed brow : the expression then was chaste and reverent,—the sinking parent's gratitude for his child's redemption from a life of woe. No word had passed : the old man read the sense of that most eloquent appeal, and his heart sympathized with its desire. He drew them to him,—joined his hand to theirs,—and then, though the voice faltered much, he uttered a blessing on their lives ; which, may the signet of our common Father ratify, that they may recognise the source of the grand good in life, in the reward of virtue and of truth unfeigned.

THE END.







